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Revelation

Unveiling

A Verse-By-Verse Commentary

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THE BOOK OF REVELATION; AN INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation is the 66th and final book of the Bible. It is comprised of 22 chapters of 404 verses. A verse-per-day evaluation of Revelation will take a tad less than 1.11 years to complete.

The name of the book comes from Latin translation of the first Greek word of it. The Greek word is *apokalupsis*, and it means an uncovering or an unveiling. It is the basis of our modern word apocalypse. The Latin translation, *revelatio*, gives the root of our modern word revelation.

In the ultimate sense, the author of the book is Jesus Christ, as directed by His angel (messenger) (see Revelation 1:1 and 22:6). Just as Paul is noted as the author of Romans even though he had a scribe to write what he spoke (see Romans 16:22), so Revelation comes from the Lord through His messenger. Thus, John is more of a scribe who is directed to write what he sees and to then send it to seven named churches (Revelation 1:11).

However, it is the apostle John who records what he sees. Further, he will write much of the letter from a first-person perspective. Therefore, the book is called by some, "The Revelation of John." This is not an acceptable title though. It is rather, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." The unveiling is of Him and His workings in redemptive history.

The evidences for the book being written by the apostle John – meaning the son of Zebedee, the author of the Gospel of John, and the author of the three epistles that bear his name – are many. For a list of these, one can refer to the Bible.org introductory comments to the book.

The dating of the book is highly disputed, and – surprisingly – scholars and commentators will actually do their best to fix the dating based on their presuppositions about what the contents of the book are conveying. An earlier date (late AD60s) would justify one view, whereas a later dating will justify another view. For those who believe all of the events of Revelation have been fulfilled, the earlier view is held to. This is also true for those who believe the church has replaced Israel.

On the other hand, for those who see a fulfillment long after the book was written (meaning at the end of the church age), a later dating is considered correct. Either way, the dating of the book goes from somewhere around late AD60s to AD95).

The authenticity of the book was questioned early on, but it was also widely accepted as an inspired as well. It was accepted by such early Church Fathers as Justin Martyr, Origen, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexander, and Hippolytus, among others.

The book of Revelation relies heavily on the Old Testament, referencing it over five hundred times. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum complied an exhaustive list of these which can be viewed at THIS LINK (or you can find it on our Superior Word Sermon Audio page under "edocs").
Therefore, in understanding what is conveyed in Revelation, the student of the Bible should be fully versed in the Old Testament as well.

The letter is specifically addressed to "the seven churches which are in Asia." However, these seven churches are then analyzed by scholars based on their own presuppositions in order to form a basis for their doctrine concerning the entire book. For example, the heresy known as hyperdispensationalism claims that the churches are Jewish churches, basing this on the high amount of references to the Old Testament "Jewish" symbolism.

Others view the seven churches as actual New Testament churches, but they are being specifically chosen in order to reveal a pattern which may apply to any given church at any time during the church age.

The location of the writing of the book is Patmos, a remote island off the coast of Asia Minor. It was a Roman penal colony at the time of the writing, and John was there "for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ," meaning that he was incarcerated there for his testimony of these things (see Revelation 1:9).

Regarding the interpretation of the book, there are numerous schools of thought concerning what is being conveyed. For the scholar who is writing a commentary on Revelation, it is nearly impossible to not evaluate these views without presuppositions. One does not normally write a commentary on something without being convinced already of what he believes. As this is true with me, my evaluations are given based on what I already believe.

Due to the immense number of views, a commentary on all of them would be innumerable pages in length, and it is totally unnecessary to discuss every one of them. Rather, a short breakdown of four main views, to give an overall sense of how the book can be perceived are –

1) Preterist View – This view claims that the events of Revelation are already fulfilled: *preter* meaning "before." The preterist view was developed in large part

by Alcazar, a 17th century Jesuit scholar. The belief in this view is that the destruction of the temple in AD70 was the time of the book's fulfillment. Some preterists believe Christ returned at that time (a heresy known as hyper-preterism), and others believe this is still future but the rest of the book is already fulfilled. Preterism is incorrect and this study will disregard it completely, except to occasionally note claims of preterists during the study, if applicable.

2) Historicist View – This view sees Revelation as on-going and being fulfilled throughout history. Revelation's prophecies then are believed to be fulfilled in major events of human history and are recognizable as such. Historicism as an overall approach to Revelation is incorrect, but this doesn't negate the fact that many patterns and parallels have occurred within history that match the events of the book. The Church Age has many exciting parallels to the time of the Law and the Temple in Jerusalem which overlap in amazing ways as well. As Ecclesiastes 1:9 states – "That which has been *is* what will be, that which *is* done is what will be done, and *there is* nothing new under the sun." Therefore, it is no surprise to see major events in Revelation fitting into the overall Church Age in recognizable patterns. But Historicism overlooks the important fact that Revelation 4-19 is dealing not with the church, but with the nation of Israel.

3) Idealist View – This view looks at the book as a spiritual conflict of the overall principles of good versus evil, and which encompass non-historical elements. This view discounts the fact that the letters are written to seven churches about their actual state, and that it specifically says that the events detailed throughout the book "must shortly take place" (see Revelation 1:1 and 22:6). Thus, there is the sense of the literal nature of the events, even if they are clothed in apocalyptic apparel.

4) The Futurist View – This view holds that the events recorded by John are future to the time he is writing. This is obvious based on the words "must shortly take place." But what "shortly" means must be considered from the perspective of the Bible. It can encompass an extended period of time (meaning the past two millennia are included in this view).

   Of the futurist view, there are countless subdivisions. Again, it is unnecessary to discuss every one of them. Rather, a short breakdown of the view I hold to is all that is necessary for the reader to decide if he wishes to continue the study or not. At times, the incorrect views of others may be discussed during the verse by verse evaluation of the book, but the view which I hold to is the Dispensationalist View.

This view looks at the Bible as occurring in "dispensations." There are seven of them – Innocence, Conscience, Government, Promise, Law, Grace, and Millennial Kingdom. The Tribulation period detailed in the book of Revelation is not a separate dispensation. Rather it is the final seven years of the Dispensation of the Law which is given to Israel alone to finally come to a realization of the fact that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, and that they missed Him when He came.

One must read and understand Daniel 9:24-27 to be able to fully grasp what is occurring in the book of Revelation. In those verses, God gave Daniel an outline of the history of the nation of Israel; a prophetic timetable comprising a 490-year timeframe. The fulfillment of the first 483 years came to an end on 6 April AD 32 when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, five days before His crucifixion. The prophetic calendar for those 490 years stopped at that time for the nation of Israel.

The Church Age began approximately 2 months later on the day of Pentecost and has continued since then. When the Church Age ends at the rapture of the church (coming soon to a trumpet blast near you…), the nation of Israel will again be the focus of God's attention on earth. The seven years detailed in the book of Revelation (from Revelation 4:2 until Revelation 19:10) are the final seven years of Daniel's "70 7's" or 490 years.

The main theme of the book of Revelation is "The consummation of all things in Christ." Thus, the main purpose of the book is twofold.

1) To provide hope for the persecuted church and encourage them to persevere, and
2) To motivate Christians to godly and wise living. The main presentation of Jesus Christ in the book is "Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords."

A short review of the book includes the following –

Revelation
Author – The Apostle John
Date - mid 90s
Theme – The consummation of all things in Christ.
The 7-year tribulation and national Israel's coming into the New Covenant as a prerequisite for Christ's second coming.

Purpose –

1) To provide hope for the persecuted church and encourage them to persevere.

2) To motivate Christians to godly and wise living.

Presentation of Christ – King of kings and Lord of lords

Rather than a long breakdown of the book into an overall and all-encompassing outline which you can find on many dispensationalist websites, a brief synopsis of what is ahead would be –

Chapters 1-3 are directed to the church. The seven letters to the seven churches are symbolic of the seven types of churches which characterize the Church Age.

Chapters 4-19 concern the nation of Israel and describe the seven years of Daniel's 70th week.

Chapter 19 details the return of Christ to Israel as prophesied in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus' own words. The church will return with Jesus at this time.

Chapter 20 describes the Millennial Kingdom (a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on earth, from Jerusalem) which was prophesied in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus' words. After this period is the Great White Throne judgment of humanity.

Chapter 21 describes the completion of God's plan for humanity when He creates a "new heaven and a new earth" which will be the eternal state of the believers. What was lost will be restored, but it will be far better because in the dispensation of innocence there was no possession of the knowledge of good and evil. What is coming will be with the possession of this knowledge and thus the redeemed of the ages will be able to appreciate the greatness of what God has done for His redeemed creatures.

Chapter 22 finishes the book and the Bible with an admonition, a blessing, and a warning along with other details.

Finally, as an enticement for you to want to look for hidden patterns in Scripture, the following chart concerning the 22 chapters of Revelation and the corresponding 22 letters of the Hebrew aleph-beth is provided for you. Each letter of the aleph-beth has its own meaning. The structure of the book of Revelation, in its 22 chapters, corresponds beautifully to these 22 letters. Interestingly, the 21 chapters of the gospel of John follow this same pattern, and they thus, at times, are a corresponding nature to the book of Revelation –

The Book of Revelation – Amen

Book Superstructure	Book Structure/ The aleph-bet	Book Outline
Jesus Christ, the Overcomer revealed.	**Aleph** - God	1. Prologue - The letter to the 7 Churches.
Instructions on how to be an overcomer – (vs.7, 11, 17, 26)	**Beth** – The church.	2. Letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira.
Instructions on how to be an overcomer (2) – (vs.5, 12, 21)	**Gimel** – Walk – Walk with me, dressed in white.	3. Letters to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.
	Dalet – Door – A door standing open in heaven – the rapture.	4. The throne in heaven and the One on the throne.
	He – Reveal – The Opening of the Scroll.	5. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has prevailed and is worthy!
	Waw – Secure – Bestowal of everlasting life, the white robe	6. Opening of the first six seals – the Day of the Lord has come.
	Zayin – Nourish – Neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore.	7. The 144,000 and the great multitude.
	Heth – Destroy – the beginning of judgments.	8. The seventh seal and four trumpets.
	Teth – Surround (as in a basket) – the bottomless pit.	9. 2 trumpets and 1 woe.

	Yod – Something held in a hand – The little book.	10. The sweet book of bitterness.
A final appeal for repentance. The witnesses "overcome" and then they "overcome!"	**Kaph** - Outstretched Hands - Modeh Anachnu (We give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty.)*	11. The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ.
	Lamed – The male Child who will rule all nations.	12. War in heaven.
Book Superstructure	Book Structure	Book Outline
	Mem – Chaos – The beast rising out of the sea.	13. The beasts from the sea and the earth.
	Nun – Seed/Son (v.14)	14. The reaping of the earth; the great winepress of the wrath of God.
	Samech – The sea of glass.	15. The seven angels with the seven final plagues.
	Ayin – The eye/to watch – Blessed is he who watches (v.15).	16. Pouring out the seven bowls of God's wrath.
The saints "overcome," thus becoming "overcomers!"	**Pe** – An expression of wisdom – Here is the mind which has wisdom (v.9).	17. Mystery Babylon – the Mother of Harlots.
	Tsade – Righteousness –	18. Babylon is fallen.

	The judgment of Babylon.	
	Qoph – The sun (v.17), and to call – "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God."	19. Four Alleluias and the victorious return of Christ.
	Resh – First – The first resurrection.	20. The millennial reign followed by the Great White Throne judgment.
Pay close heed - He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (v.7)	**Shin** – The eternal flame – The illumination of God and the light of the Lamb.	21. The New Jerusalem.
Jesus Christ, the Overcomer says "come."	**Tav** – The last. The Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. The sign, mark, signal. The cross on which the Lamb died.	22. Eternity with Christ. **

*Notice the connection between John 11 and Revelation 11. Both fit the same style of prayer. The difference is that in John, Christ gives thanks to the Father; in Revelation, we give thanks collectively to Him.
**Revelation ends with 22:21 and not 22:22 – very interesting!

<u>Life application:</u> In the next 404, days we will see the culmination of God's great plan of redemption as detailed by the Apostle John. This book has been interpreted in many ways, and the book marks a large dividing line between denominations and sects within

Christianity. Many heretical views have arisen from an evaluation of the book or are used in an incorrect evaluation of it.

Because there are many ways to approach Revelation, and because of these many opinions on the book's meaning and fulfillment, it is often ignored, often misused, and often maligned. In the end though, it is a book of absolute truth because it is a part of God's word. Therefore, we mishandle it or misinterpret it at our own peril – just like all of Scripture.

One of the main dividing lines over the contents of Revelation comes down to one word – Israel. Do you believe that the church has replaced Israel? Does Israel have a future purpose in redemptive history? If one believes that God has rejected Israel, it means that God's promises and covenant faithfulness cannot be trusted. Is salvation eternal, or can it be lost? National Israel is a template of individual salvation. If God has rejected them, He may also reject you. Is that what God has come to do? Has He come to provide eternal insecurity to His redeemed?

Revelation, and indeed all of the Bible, would say, "No." What will be presented to you in these next 404 days is based on this idea. Have surety in your salvation. God is faithful, even when you are unfaithful.

Are you ready? Let's discover the fulfillment of the ages as we explore Revelation!

> "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.'
> Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen." Revelation 22:20, 21

Lord God, open our hearts to Your word. Speak to us as we pursue a knowledge of You in it each time we open it. And Lord, convict us that it is right, proper, and necessary to be in it day and night. Help us to put Your word first in our lives because it tells us of Jesus, and because Jesus reveals You to us. May it be so, all the days of our lives. Amen.

CHAPTER 1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, Revelation 1:1

The book of Revelation opens with the words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." The word "Revelation" is translated from the Greek word *apokalupsis*. That is derived from *apó*, meaning "away from," and *kalýptō*, meaning "to cover." Thus, it signifies to uncover, or to reveal what is hidden. It makes plain that which was previously obscured.

Here, then, we see that what will be presented is the "unveiling of Jesus Christ." It is an unveiling that He makes. However, it is also what needs to be unveiled concerning who He is and what His purposes are for the world within the unfolding plan of redemption. In other words, the world fell into sin, but God in Christ – even from the very beginning – presented the initiation of His plan. That was found explicitly stated for the first time in Genesis 3:15 –

> "And I will put enmity
> Between you and the woman,
> And between your seed and her Seed;
> He shall bruise your head,
> And you shall bruise His heel."

From that point on, the redemptive narrative was carefully recorded. However, there are veiled hints of the work of God in Christ even from Genesis 1:1. These continue, carefully hidden within the recorded narrative, to reveal what God was doing in typological pictures of Jesus. To understand these types and pictures, one can start with the Genesis 1:1 sermon from the Superior Word and continue on through until every sermon has been seen. They carefully evaluate the passage presented, revealing these truths.

However, the Jewish people as a whole rejected Christ when He came. Their eyes have been blinded to the truth of who He is. The book of Revelation, leaning heavily on Old Testament writings, will tie those writings into a panorama of events that have and will come upon the world, demonstrating to them that Jesus is the Christ and that they missed Him on His first advent.

However, the church itself has been woefully blinded in its own theology concerning God's covenant promises to Israel. The church has claimed that it has replaced Israel in the redemptive narrative. Because of this, Revelation is given, when properly understood, to steer believers away from this aberrant theology as well.

The book begins with an address to the church which lasts for three chapters, instructing them that they are the main focus of God's attention within the unfolding redemptive narrative. However, in verse 4:2, a dramatic shift will take place, with the intent of unveiling Jesus Christ to the nation of Israel. The church will not be mentioned again until Chapter 19. During all of the intervening chapters, the events focus on Israel. This is to bring them to an understanding of who Christ is, and that what is said of Him in both the Old and New Testaments is the true and reliable word of God.

This unveiling, then, is intended to go in both directions – opening the eyes of the church to God's faithfulness to Israel, and also to opening the eyes of Israel to the Messiah they had missed for the many years of their exile and punishment. It is this body of literature that John writes out concerning Jesus "which God gave Him to show His servants."

Jesus Christ is the Mediator between God and man. Being fully God and fully man, He is the means of transmitting the events of redemptive history to the world – especially to "His servants," meaning His redeemed people. Each member of the Godhead has its own role within the Godhead, revealing the unified purpose that they share. This is seen in Jesus' words of John 16 concerning the Holy Spirit –

> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. **13** However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority,* but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. **14** He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. **15** All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you." John 16:12-15

Jesus is the one who draws out from the Father the will of God. The Holy Spirit declares what is drawn out. The process of this is what forms the word of God, and it is what then allows man to understand more fully what God is doing within the stream of time. Of this, the Pulpit Commentary rightly states –

"Christ is both the Mystery and the Revealer of it. He comes to reveal himself, and in himself the Father, whose Image he is. Thus in its opening words the book takes us beyond itself. What is revealed is not secrets about the future, but a Person. And the

Revealer is not man, but God; not John, but the Divine Son, commissioned by the Father. For even the unincarnate Word receives from the Father that which he reveals."

Understanding that it is Jesus who is the focus of the unveiling will help keep the reader free from the error of using the book of Revelation as some type of tool to predict future events. Countless readers of the book have, unfortunately, used it this way. Predictions about the date of the rapture, who the Antichrist is, and a host of other such things are dogmatically argued over, and they are always found to be incorrect. The reason for this is that they are attempting to use the book of Revelation in the wrong, self-centered, way.

Avoiding such error will keep the contents of the book in their proper perspective. Of those things God gave Christ Jesus to show to His servants, John next says that they are "things which must shortly take place."

The Greek words translated as "shortly" is *tachos*. It signifies swiftness or in a brief space of time. It can mean with quickness, speed, haste, or immediately. Those, such as preterists, will understand the word to mean "quickly" as in "soon after John penned the letter." In other words, they hold to the view that all is fulfilled millennia ago.

Others will consider the word to mean that when the events are set to come about, they will come about rapidly. Thus, a gap of two thousand years is not a violation of the intent of the word. The church age will end at the rapture, and then the events of Revelation which follow will come about rapidly. As God's faithfulness to unfaithful Israel is not to be questioned, and as His covenant promises to them must come to pass, the latter view is correct. Replacement theology and the preterist view are both false doctrines which fail to account for what is otherwise obvious concerning Israel.

John next writes, "And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John." The word "signified" comes from a Greek word meaning "to indicate" or "give a sign." It was used in John 21:19 to convey to Peter how he would die, saying, "This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God." Jesus has sent His angel to signify what would occur.

The angel, or messenger, doesn't come into the focus of the narrative until Revelation 17:1. But it is he who conveys the message to John. However, at times – and, in particular, the first three chapters of the book – Jesus speaks out His words directly to John. Therefore, the angel is there to communicate a variety of events that Jesus has specifically determined to be transmitted indirectly from Him.

In both occasions – whether from Christ directly, or through His angel – it is John who receives the word in order to record it for the servants of the Lord to read and understand. Again, it should be stressed that Revelation is not a tool for people to predict future events in a dogmatic fashion or timeframe. Rather, it is a general panorama of events which are to be fully understood after they occur, not before.

Life application: The entire Bible, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, is about Jesus Christ. However, much of the Old Testament is veiled and requires looking back from the clear focus of the Cross of Calvary to understand the types and pictures that were "shadowed" in the time prior to the incarnation.

The four Gospel accounts present a full picture of the Lord that was evident, but veiled, such as during the theophany seen by Ezekiel –

> "As for the likeness of their faces, *each* had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle." -Ezekiel 1:10

This theophany of the Lord (Yehovah) describes the four faces of Jesus presented in the Gospels – Matthew presents Jesus as the King (represented by a lion); Mark presents Jesus as the Servant (the ox); Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man (the man); and John presents Jesus as the Son of God (the eagle).

Revelation is more fully unveiling Jesus for His beloved church to understand that they have an assignment in holding to doctrinal purity and maintaining His church in the manner prescribed in the New Testament. It also has a second assignment which is to understand that He is not finished with His people, Israel.

The fulfillment of His promises to Israel, as is evidenced by His prophets – such as Daniel – is realized in the coming pages and it is a duty of all Christians to understand this. Christians are to accept that God has not rejected Israel, even during their time of "spiritual blindness" (as is indicated by Paul in Romans 11:25).

The Church Age will end at the rapture, and the time of tribulation (the time of Jacob's Trouble) will follow. Jesus is coming again, first for His church at the rapture, and then to His people Israel, as He declared with His own mouth to Jerusalem, the seat of power in Israel –

> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen

gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! **38** See! Your house is left to you desolate; **39** for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" Matthew 23:37-39

Lord, it is with eager anticipation that we begin each day in Your precious word. What other way can we start it with such comfort and joy! Please open our eyes to its truths. May our doctrine be pure, and may our hearts be receptive to the glorious love and mercy that it reveals to the people of the world. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

...who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Revelation 1:2

The words, "who bore witness," refer to John from the previous verse. The word translated as "bore witness" is *martureó*. It signifies giving evidence, making a testimony, and so on. Here, it is in the aorist tense – he "bore witness." He is stating that he saw and he has testified to what he had seen. And, as he says, he "bore witness to the word of God."

It is generally agreed that this is not speaking of the personal "Word of God," meaning Jesus Christ. Rather, it refers to either the doctrine which explains who God is, or that which God speaks out – the recorded word of God. Assuming the latter view, meaning John is stating that he has been a faithful witness to what God had revealed as His word, it can then be debated whether this is speaking of the Gospel of John or the words which are now being presented as the revelation, or unveiling, of Jesus Christ.

John could even be referring to his oral defense of the gospel of Jesus Christ, meaning everything he had presented throughout his life. He was a faithful witness of the deposit entrusted to him over the years.

The aorist tense of the verb may be a marker to signify that it is an all-encompassing thought concerning John. He "bore witness" throughout his life – in his gospel proclamations, and in his writings (inclusive of the gospel, epistles, and now Revelation) – and in any other way that was needed when the time arose (meaning in deed and action in order to bring others to a proper understanding of who Jesus Christ is).
This seems quite likely because he next says, "and to the testimony of Jesus Christ."
John will later give examples of both a general testimony, which resulted in his exile to Patmos, and of the specific testimony of recording the events of the book of Revelation–

> "I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 1:9
>
> "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."
>
> -Revelation 22:16

Therefore, John's having borne witness, referred to now, appears to his having lived an all-encompassing life of faithful service to that to which he had been called – he "bore witness ... to all things that he saw."

Here, there is a difference in source texts. Some include the word "and." Thus it would say, "and as many things as he saw." Thus, it would signify an additional category to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Without the article, or even with the article, but using it in apposition with "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" – meaning – "even as many things as he saw" – it would then define the first two categories as one thought. This is the most likely idea here. It is not a separate category, but an explanation of his having seen and witnessed to the first two.

No matter what, the main focus here is on the faithful testimony of John. We can be sure that what he has seen, said, done, and recorded is from a person who was willing to devote his life to the service of God and to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The idea here is complementary to that of John 21:24 –

> "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true."

<u>Life application:</u> Jesus' beloved disciple, John, is the one who bears witness "to the word of God." This would then be a definitive claim by John that what is recorded here is Scripture. For this reason, liberal scholars will attempt to deny this was actually received and then penned by John.

If, in fact, he received it, then they would have to admit it is inspired of God. If it is inspired by God, then it is God's word. If it is God's word, then it is authoritative in all it contains and proclaims. However, much of Revelation concerns judgment and woe. If one wants to live out a "social gospel" or a "prosperity gospel," then Revelation becomes an immense problem because both of these approaches to the gospel are proven false. Therefore, for them, it is easier to dismiss Revelation than to heed its warnings.

The book itself is centered on Jesus Christ. If this is so, then it is authoritative for the Christian on all matters it proclaims. Jesus Christ is the Word of God and the second member of the eternal Godhead. One cannot disassociate Revelation and all that it proclaims without diminishing the very structure and authority of the Bible.

Taking all this into consideration, it is at one's own peril that he dismisses the authority of the book of Revelation. Further, it is at one's own loss to not read it, study it, and heed it just like the rest of Scripture. It is for these reasons that John, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned the words in this verse.

God is competent, God is in control of His word, and God has provided us with this book for our warning and for our blessing. Let us look with anticipation at the marvels ahead of us in this wonderful study!

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the beautiful lessons that have been recorded in Your word. Yes, there are parts that are difficult for us to read, and many of them are considered unpalatable in our modern society, but they are Your words. Please help us to understand them and to take them in the context which You intended. May we be faithful stewards of Your word at all times. Thank You for Your precious word, O God! Amen.

Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near. Revelation 1:3

Here we have a description of how the church was initially set up to transmit and receive the word of God. It is something that is all but lost to the church today, with very few following the model laid out here. The verse begins with, "Blessed *is* he who reads."

In the church, there was a Reader of the word. Someone would take the scroll or book, and he would read out loud to the congregation. At the time that Revelation was received, and even until very recent times in relation to the overall church age, owning a copy of the Bible, or even of a single book of the Bible, was a rare thing. They were expensive, time-consuming to make copies, and thus not widely available.
For most of this age, there may have been one copy in a town or village. This is where the term "chained to the pulpit" comes from. Bibles were so precious that they were carefully guarded. Unfortunately, this led to its own problems concerning doctrine and the like. However, for those churches who had a copy of the Bible, or even just copies of various books of the Bible, they were read aloud. Here we are told that the one who read the word was blessed.

John continues with, “and those who hear.” This is the congregation. The implication is that there is an open and public reading of the word. Those who have gathered to hear the word read are also promised a blessing. Of the words thus far, Vincent’s Word Studies makes the following comment –

“The passage is of some weight in determining the date of this book. The stated reading of the Apostolical writings did not exist as a received form before the destruction of Jerusalem, a.d. 70.”

As this is so, then the idea of the prophecies of Revelation being fulfilled in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem is incorrect. In this, the preterist view of eschatology is found incorrect. Preterism is a flawed system which is not at all supported by the overall content of Scripture.

With this understanding, John continues with, “the words of this prophecy.” Here we are shown the main content of the book of Revelation. It is a book of prophecy. However, some of the prophecies are tied in with events that are written about in the present tense. This is particularly true concerning the seven letters to the seven churches that will be conveyed early in the book.

What is said in those verses details things that are actually occurring in individual churches at the time John recorded them. However, they are also events which continue to occur throughout the entire church age. Thus, the warnings given to those seven churches continue to apply to those in the church at all times – prophetically anticipating that the same problems will arise until the Lord comes for His church. This is why John continues with, “and keep.”

These words are directed to both the reader and the hearer. Just because someone is a reader, it does not give him a position where he can ignore what is read. In this, to hear implies not only the physical act of hearing, but of attentively listening and assimilating what is heard.

To “keep” is to then observe what has been assimilated. The idea of “keeping” goes back to the Hebrew word *shamar*. It signifies to be circumspect, keep, observe, and so on. It comes from a primitive root signifying to hedge about (as with thorns) and thus to guard. Moses uses the word when speaking to Israel, telling them to both hear and keep what he presented to them.

As an active example concerning this, when one keeps the sheep, he observes, guards, protects, and so on. The idea is beautifully expressed in the 121st Psalm when referring to the Lord –

> "He will not allow your foot to be moved;
> He who keeps you will not slumber.
> **4** Behold, He who **keeps** Israel
> Shall neither slumber nor sleep." Psalm 121:3, 4

Just as the Lord attentively keeps Israel, so we are to not only "hear" the word, but we are to "keep" the word. Further, the verb is given as a present participle, active voice – "keeping." When hearing the word, we are then to constantly keep, from moment to moment. The active voice says that we are to apply our keeping as the agent of the action.

With this understanding, the word "blessed" can be explained. In its most basic sense, it means "happy." From that, one can think of fortunate, or well off. One should simply consider that in reading and keeping the words of Revelation, they will remain happy even in a world that is troubling, filled with terrifying events, and so on. The final pages of the book show what life will be like for the Lord's redeemed in the eternal state. In "keeping" that in one's heart, one can be happy through the most difficult of all human trials.

John then says what is to be kept with the words, "those things which are written in it." The verb translated as "which are written" is a perfect participle. They have been written, nothing more will be coming, and the word stands as such. What has been received is all that will be coming.

Because Revelation is the last book of the Christian canon, it shows us that no further prophetic word is to be expected. Anyone who claims prophetic revelation is to be ignored. God's word is complete and no "prophecy," or "word from the Lord" is to be expected after the reception of this final book. It is a simple note which should, if understood and accepted as such, keep those in the church free from being duped by people who claim visions and prophecies. Unfortunately, this precept is widely ignored, and many are led down unhealthy avenues of deceit.

Lastly, John gives an explicit reason for hearing and keeping. He says, "for the time *is* near." The word translated as "time" is *kairos*. It signifies "the opportune time." It is a particular moment, rather than an ongoing chronology of time. The word signifying "near" means at hand, or ready. Thus, in the sense of time, it speaks of that which is

imminent. However, it does not necessarily mean that it is expected to happen and be fulfilled within any given timeframe.

The words to the seven churches are spoken as of "right now." And yet, those types which are given can be reapplied at any time and to any church. Therefore, the time of such events is always near. As this is so, then what can be anticipated for those things after the church is removed can be (and so far, have been) thousands of years later. Christians are always expected to watch for events that will usher in the anticipated next age.

Life application: As noted, there is a blessing promised to those who (in context of the time this was written):

1. Read – the one who recites the words of the book of prophecy aloud to others.
2. Hear – those who listen to the reader as it is read aloud.

Both of these categories will receive their blessing if they keep what they have heard. In other words, we can refer to the words of James 1:22-25 –

> "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; **24** for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. **25** But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it,* and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."

Anyone can sit and read the Bible or listen to it being read and then go on with their life, completely unaffected by its message. But it takes a discerning soul to hear the words, believe them, and apply them to their lives. This then is where the blessing comes from.

As far as the church age, it is of indeterminate length. Just because John wrote this almost 2000 years ago, that has no bearing on the nearness of the moment from God's perspective. It is a mistake in thinking that because the amount of time has been lengthy from our perspective that the admonition here is somehow faulty. We don't know the times and seasons which are at God's authority. We are to live our lives as if Jesus' return could come at any time.

Lord God, as the words of the Bible unfold before us as we hear it read, or read it ourselves, help us to take them to heart and apply them to our lives. May we be changed

by the words, renewing our hearts and minds, and growing more like You every day. May this be so, and may it be to Your glory. Amen.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia:
Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, Revelation 1:4

With the introductory verses complete, the greeting now opens with the author simply stating his name, "John." Nothing else is given, such as title, father's name, etc. Because of the lack of any of these, it is obvious that the author is widely recognized. It adds a high note of surety that this is the apostle John – the author of the gospel and three epistles ascribed to him as well.

His address is "to the seven churches." The number seven, throughout Scripture, is of great significance. EW Bullinger defines it as the number of *spiritual perfection*. These are not the only seven churches that are found in the area being addressed, and so the number seven defines not "all" the churches but rather "these select" churches.

The reason for selecting these particular churches will become evident as the letter proceeds. In short, it is because each typifies any given church at any given time. Some churches will face this issue, while others may face another issue. However, all can be categorized by either the strengths or the failings that are mentioned by the Lord here in Revelation. Therefore, the seven churches represent the fullness of the one true church founded on Jesus Christ. It is these seven churches "which are in Asia."

The term "Asia" does not carry the same significance today that it once did. Rather, it speaks of the Roman proconsular province known as Asia. It is in the western area of Asia Minor and is a part of the country of Turkey today. It is referred to throughout the book of Acts, and both Paul and Peter refer to it in their letters, such as in 1 Corinthians 16:19.

These are Gentile churches in Gentile areas. It is important to understand this, lest the intent of the letters to the churches get twisted in order to justify the heretical doctrine of hyperdispensationalism (which will be addressed as we continue through the verses). Christ Jesus gave a beautiful picture of this in the feeding of the multitudes during His ministry.

The two relevant passages are found in the gospels, where He fed five thousand and where he fed four thousand. After feeding them, the pieces were gathered up, and the exact amount gathered was recorded –

But Jesus, being aware of *it,* said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? **18** Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? **19** When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?"
They said to Him, "Twelve."
20 "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?"
And they said, "Seven." Mark 8:17-20

The words translated as "baskets" and "large basket" are entirely different. One is a *kophinos*, or small handbasket. The other is a *spuris*, or large plaited basket. So large was one *spuris* that it was used in Acts 9:25 to lower Paul down from the wall of the city to allow him to escape. A point was being made by mentioning the baskets and the number of them that would only be realized later.

There were twelve small baskets representing the twelve tribes of Israel, from whom would come a small harvest – a remnant (Romans 11:5, for example). There were seven large baskets representing the seven churches from whom would come a large harvest, a harvest which has continued on for two thousand years. These seven churches of Asia are given to represent the one church. To them, John next says, "Grace to you and peace."

Grace (*charis* in Greek) is unmerited favor; it cannot be earned. This is the common greeting among the Greek people. Peace however is the common greeting among the Hebrew people. In their language, the word is shalom. This is more than a greeting for calm or quiet. Rather, it is a state of wholeness and completion in all ways. John unites the two terms just as the church is united between Jew and Gentile. This grace precedes the peace because only after receiving the grace of God can a person experience the peace of God. That is extended, as it says, "from Him who is and who was and who is to come."

In this greeting, there is a veiled and yet sure reference to the Trinity. The words "from Him who is and who was and who is to come" are a united thought in one clause. It is, at this time, referring to God the Father. This is certain because verse 5 will continue by saying, "and from Jesus Christ." However, the term "who is and who was and who is to come" will also be used to refer to Jesus in verse 8.

The term will also be used in Revelation 4:8 and 11:17, and will be discussed at that time. Therefore, John is setting up a theological tower that supports the notion that

Jesus Christ is fully God. This is perfectly evident in how he is structuring his words. Next, John says, "and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne."

This is a reference to the Holy Spirit who manifests the character and nature of God in a sevenfold manner. This is seen in veiled ways in the Old Testament, such as in Isaiah 11 where both the Son and the Spirit are referred to –

> "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
> And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
> **2** The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
> The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
> The Spirit of counsel and might,
> The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD." Isaiah 11:1, 2

Upon the Son rests the "sevenfold Spirit" –

> The Spirit of the (1) LORD, meaning Yehovah; the Spirit of (2) wisdom and (3) understanding; the Spirit of (4) counsel and (5) might; the Spirit of (6) knowledge and of (7) the fear of the LORD.

To more get a fuller understanding of John's use of his words here, Vincent's Word Studies provides more insight –

"The Father is *Him which is*, *and which was*, *and which is to come*. This is a paraphrase of the unspeakable name of God (Exodus 3:14), the absolute and unchangeable. Ὁ ὢν, *the One who is*, is the Septuagint translation of Exodus 3:14, "I am the ὁ ὢν (*I am*):" " ὁ ὢν (*I am*), hath sent me unto you." *The One who was* (ὁ ἦν). The Greek has no imperfect participle, so that the finite verb is used. *Which is* and *which was* form one clause, to be balanced against *which is to come*. Compare Revelation 11:17; Revelation 16:5; and "*was* (ἦν) in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). *Which is to come* (ὁ ἐρχόμενος). Lit., *the One who is coming*. This is not equivalent to *who shall be*; i.e., the author is not intending to describe the abstract existence of God as covering the future no less than the past and the present. If this had been his meaning, he would have written ὁ ἐσόμενος , *which shall be*. The phrase *which is to come* would not express the future eternity of the Divine Being. The dominant conception in the title is rather that of *immutability*. Further, the name does not emphasize so much God's abstract existence, as it does His permanent covenant relation to His people. Hence the phrase *which is to come*, is to be explained in accordance with the key-note of the book, which is the second coming of the Son (Revelation 1:7; Revelation 22:20)."

Life application: The seven churches fanned out about 50 miles from Ephesus, but (as noted) they are not the only seven churches in that area. Rather, they were carefully chosen because they had specific problems that needed to be addressed and which represent the same situations that have crept up in churches since that time. In other words, they are emblematic of the entire Church Age – from Pentecost to the Rapture.

Also, the specific wording here in Revelation provides a clear and unambiguous indication of the eternality of Jesus. He is not a created being. Rather, He is the eternal God. As the thought concerning God the Father in this verse is later in verse 8 applied to Jesus, it shows that Christ is fully God. The wording here, taken together with the coming verses, demonstrate this. It is a similar analogy to Hebrews 13:8 – "Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever."

This is a main purpose of the book of Revelation. It is to provide a full understanding that Jesus is God, and that humanity is accountable to God by how we receive this truth. We cannot call on a "Jesus" meaning "another Jesus" (see 2 Corinthians 11:4) who is a created being and expect to be saved. Such a teaching is heretical. Jesus Christ is the central focus of the biblical message. He is the incarnation of the Lord (Yehovah) of the Old Testament. He is God.

Oh God! We proclaim that Jesus is Lord. We acknowledge that He is the One to whom our hearts, our love, our devotion, and our allegiance belongs. He is the One who reveals Your heart to us, and it is through faith in Him that we receive the blessed and precious Holy Spirit. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord who makes reconciliation to You possible! Hallelujah and Amen.

... and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.
To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, Revelation 1:5

Still in his opening salutation, a salutation which is intended to convey grace and peace to the reader, and which began in the previous verse, John now comes to his portion of the greeting which pertains to the Son, saying, "and from Jesus Christ." Placing the Son last in the greeting is John's way of aligning Him with what he will next say concerning the Son. From verse 5, through verse 8, the words will refer to the Person of Jesus Christ.

In this, he begins with a threefold description of Him, beginning with the note that He is "the faithful witness." The expression refers back to the 89th Psalm, a psalm which is clearly messianic in nature –

"If his sons forsake My law
And do not walk in My judgments,
31 If they break My statutes
And do not keep My commandments,
32 Then I will punish their transgression with the rod,
And their iniquity with stripes.
33 Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him,
Nor allow My faithfulness to fail.
34 My covenant I will not break,
Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.
35 Once I have sworn by My holiness;
I will not lie to David:
36 His seed shall endure forever,
And his throne as the sun before Me;
37 It shall be established forever like the moon,
Even *like* the faithful witness in the sky." *Selah* Psalm 89:30-37

As the objects in the sky testify to the handiwork of the Creator, so are the promises of God faithful. In His covenant with David, there is the surety that God would fulfill what He had spoken. The coming of Christ is the fulfillment of these promises. The sun is likened unto Christ in Malachi 4:2, speaking of His righteousness.

This term ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, or "the witness the faithful," refers to Christ's testimony, but especially his death. The word *martus*, or "witness," is where our word "martyr" comes from. When standing before Pilate, Jesus said –

> "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." John 18:37

John understood that Christ's life, even to the point of death, was a witness to God's plan of redemption that had been promised since the very fall of man. Christ Jesus faithfully accomplished His work. In doing so, and without sinning during the process, He became "the firstborn from the dead."

It is the same expression used by Paul in Colossians 1:18. The Bible is clear that Christ was dead. His human body suffered and died. And more, He was buried. The account carefully details this in order to show that Christ didn't just appear dead. He was truly dead. And yet, the Bible proclaims that he prevailed over death, coming from the grave on the third day.

The Bible also speaks of others coming from the dead, such as Lazarus in John 11. But these instances are restoration of life, not a resurrection from the dead. The difference is that those people went on to die again. Christ, through the resurrection, has an eternal life. And more, in Him is the ability to grant that life to others. The reason why takes us back to the fact that He is the "faithful witness."

In His life, He did not sin. As death is the wages of sin, then – as Peter says in Acts 2 – "it was not possible that He should be held by it." His perfection is testified to by the resurrection. Understanding this, John next mentions, concerning Christ, a third aspect. He is "the ruler over the kings of the earth."

In the accomplishment of His work, faithfully testifying to the Lord's hand in it, and as is evidenced by His resurrection, the Lord God placed Christ Jesus in the position of all authority and rule. This is seen in Jesus' words of Matthew 28, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Frequently, Acts and the epistles state that Christ is now at the right hand of God. The right hand signifies not a physical position, but rather rule and authority.

All rule and authority belong to Him. John focuses on the earthly rule here, showing that what is coming in the book of Revelation is not out of the control of God, but that it is judgment by God upon the earth. This idea of Christ's faithful witness, His being the firstborn from the dead, and His possessing the power of God, is also seen in Paul's words to those in Rome –

> "...concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, **4** *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."
>
> -Romans 1:3, 4

This threefold note concerning Jesus corresponds to His three positions of Prophet (witness), High Priest (atoning death), and King (ruler over the kings of the earth). These positions will be noted throughout the book of Revelation. John next continues with a note concerning the first and second positions, that of faithful witness and High Priest. From here, through verse 6, the words form a beautiful doxology, beginning with, "To Him who loved us."

John 3:16 speaks of God so loving the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Christ is that Son, and He is the faithful witness of God's love, living out a perfect life and giving that perfect life up in exchange for our wrongdoing. In this act, John continues, saying, "and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

The Old Testament, and the book of Leviticus in particular, details the sacrificial system of Israel – all of which is a type and picture of what Christ would accomplish for His people. The animal had to be perfect and without blemish. It was then presented to the high priest where it was slaughtered in exchange for the sins committed by an individual, or even by the entire congregation. Without the shedding of innocent blood, atonement could not be made.

However, the book of Hebrews says that "*it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). The sacrificial system of Israel was given to prefigure Christ. Only in a like for like exchange could atonement be made. But it had to be a perfect offering. Thus, Peter says –

> "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; **18** knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Peter 1:17-19

Christ is the fulfillment of those ancient types and shadows. It is He alone who could wash "us from our sins in His own blood." The idea of washing signifies total cleansing. The sinner is made pure in the precious blood of Jesus Christ. The defilement is rinsed away, reconciliation with the Creator is made, and peace between the warring parties has ceased.

<u>Life application:</u> Jesus is the complete expression of God in a form that we can understand. He declared, or revealed, to us the Father that was otherwise unknowable except through creation. This encompasses His entire life, death, and resurrection. Being fully man, He was able to suffer and die, which He did. But because of His sinlessness, death could not hold Him. In His resurrection, Jesus proved that He was not a created being, but the Heir of creation. He is the incarnate Word of God. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

In John 13:10, on the night of His crucifixion, Christ Jesus used two different words for washing, saying, "He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean." the bath represents justification, or being declared "not guilty." The word translated as "wash" indicates our sanctification. As we sin after salvation, we confess it and are cleansed from that sin; a sin that doesn't affect salvation, but rather our on-going relationship.

Thus, the doctrine of eternal salvation is seen in what Christ did for His people. We are cleansed, once and forever, of our sins. Let us then wash ourselves daily from the external defilement that we incur so that we will be acceptable instruments, ready for service to our God.

Lord God, thank You for what you have done in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the full expression of Your infinite being, an expression of You in a body and a form that we can comprehend and appreciate as He reveals You to us for all eternity! Thank You, O God, for sending Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to lead us back to Yourself. Praises and glory belong to You forever and ever. Amen.

...and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Revelation 1:6

As is the case throughout Revelation, and which will be noted from time to time, various Greek manuscripts will read somewhat differently. It is hard to be dogmatic over which reading is correct, but normally the variations are not too great.

An example of this is found here. Some manuscripts say, "and has made us kings and priests." Others say, "and has made us a kingdom of priests." In this case, the latter is more likely. Vincent's Word Studies notes that the term "king" is never applied in the New Testament to individuals Christians. That is, obviously, an argument from silence, but it is at least worthy of note. Vincent's goes on to say that –

"Kingdom describes the body of the redeemed collectively. Priests indicates their individual position. Peter observes the same distinction (1 Peter 2:5) in the phrases living stones (individuals) and a spiritual house (the body collectively), and combines both kings and priests in another collective term, royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). The priesthood of believers grows out of the priesthood of Christ (Psalm 60:4; Zechariah 6:13; Hebrews 7-10)."

There have already been several such differences in the first five verses of Revelation which have not been highlighted. This commentary follows the texts from which the NKJV is derived, but it is still worthy to note such differences from time to time. With this understanding, the words of this verse – words which continue the doxology that began in verse 5 – now state, "and has made us kings [a kingdom] and priests."

One of the errors of the heretical doctrine of hyperdispensationalism is the claim that the terminology here, and throughout the letters to the seven churches, cannot apply to the church due to its "Jewish" symbolism. That will continue to be addressed as the

commentaries continue, but one of such terms is claimed to be right here in this verse. It is argued that it is the Jews, not the Gentiles, who are labeled as "priests." Further, it is argued that the "kingdom" terminology applies only to Jews. They say that Paul refers to neither in his writings, but rather Peter, the apostle to the Jews, does. For example –

> "But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;" 1 Peter 2:9

Peter is quoting the book of Exodus –

> "'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. **6** And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."
>
> -Exodus 19:5, 6

Hyperdispensationalism claims there are two gospels, one to the Jews and one to the Gentiles, and they use these verses as an attempt to show that there are also two bodies based on their heretical teachings. But both of these claims are false. The idea of being kings or a kingdom permeates Paul's writings, the term "kingdom" being applied to believers almost fifteen times. It would be rather inane to have a kingdom without a King.

Further, the idea of being priests is not limited to the Jewish people and a Jewish kingdom. Paul uses the term in the book of Romans, saying –

> "But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, **16** to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that *my* offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."
>
> -Romans 15:15, 16 (NASB)

Paul shows that preaching the gospel is a priestly duty in the New Covenant. He then says this to those at Corinth –

> "Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat *of the things* of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings of* the altar? **14** Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." 1 Corinthians 9:13

Again, Paul directly equates preachers of the gospel to the priests who ministered in the temple under the Old Covenant, demonstrating that they were only types of what would come in the New Covenant. The word "serve" in that quote (Greek: *hieros*) signifies the sacred duty of a priest.

The sources of the problems with these heretical teachings are many, including 1) using only one translation of the Bible (normally the highly inaccurate KJV) to support the incorrect interpretations, 2) a failure to know and understand the purpose of the Old Testament symbolism and how it points to both Christ and the church, and 3) simple antisemitism.

These are but a few of the reasons for the incorrect theology. Understanding this, John's words are, in fact, based on the quote (above) from Exodus 19. The Lord said that Israel would be a special treasure unto Him. The term Hebrew word translated as "special treasure" is *segulah*. It denotes personal property. That is now said of those in the church.

What is happening here is that the Gentiles who were once excluded from the covenant promises "have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (See Ephesians 2:11-13). Together, the believers of all ages are built into a spiritual temple, and our duties and offices come from God's selection of us, not from genealogy or family inheritance. Rather, it is because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

This body, the kingdom of priests, is said to be "to His God and Father." Christ is the King (1 Timothy 1:17) of His people, and He is also the High Priest (Hebrews 2:17, etc.) of His people. It is Christ who performs the priestly mediatorial duty between His people and His Father (1 Timothy 2:5). He is the fulfillment of all of the types and shadows of those things found under the Old Covenant, and His work extends beyond the Jewish people to include the Gentiles who have been grafted into the commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:12,1 13).

Understanding this, and the majestic implications for the people of the world, John continues with, "to Him *be* glory." The same phrase is ascribed to God the Father and to Jesus elsewhere in the New Testament. Here, it is applied to Jesus, demonstrating that John is equating Jesus with God. This is because in Isaiah, the Lord (Yehovah) says, "My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8).

For John to ascribe this to Jesus, if He were not God, would be blasphemy. Understanding this, John's words indicate that all things came from God, all things belong to God, and all things are to bring glory to God. It is He who accomplished all the

work necessary for our salvation, and it is He who has then guaranteed that the saints will rise and live forever in His presence. He alone is sovereign over all things, and it is right that all things are to be done by us to bring Him all of the glory that He is due.

The verse finishes with, "and dominion forever and ever. Amen." This same dominion terminology is used in 1 Peter 4:11 and 1 Peter 5:11. It is Jesus Christ to whom the praises shall never end. In Him, the marvel shall never cease. And because of Him, the awe at beholding the incomprehensible greatness of God will never get old.

From Him flows an eternal stream of delight and majesty. In the new heavens and the new earth, we shall behold this with our eyes, and the praises of God will know no end. And it was all made possible by His own wisdom and splendor, displayed in the most amazing way of all –

> "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. **17** And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. **18** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." Colossians 1:15-18

Life application: God is taking for Himself a collection of humans to be for His praise and glory. We serve Him as a kingdom of priests. Now, through the blood of Christ, all have access "through the veil" and into the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 10:19).

Jesus Christ is both our King (a kingdom without a king makes no sense) and our High Priest. We will serve under Him as a kingdom of "kings and priests to His God and Father." Understanding the terminology and how it applies to both Jews and Gentiles, it is obvious that hyperdispensationalism is a heretical teaching. Be careful not to get pulled into such erroneous doctrine. There is one gospel to both Jew and Gentile.

Understanding this, and because we have been so chosen as a kingdom of priests, let us forever ascribe to the Lord His worth and let us forever praise His glorious name. Amen!

Lord God, it is beyond our comprehension that You would look at us and find us worthy to serve in Your kingdom. We know that it is only through Jesus and His work that this is possible. And so, may we rise each day in praise of what You have done, giving You glory, honor, and adoration for Your gracious hand upon us. You alone who are worthy. Amen.

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.
Revelation 1:7

John, after giving his greeting and a short doxology, which comprised verses 4-6, now makes a proclamation about the future concerning Christ Jesus. He says, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds." The idea of coming with the clouds is that of glory, power, and exaltation. The same type of terminology is seen of the Lord, riding on the clouds, in passages like Deuteronomy 33:26, Psalm 68:4, and Isaiah 19:1. As this is speaking of Jesus, it is thus an implied reference to His deity. Specifically, however, John's words are a clear allusion to Jesus' own words recorded in the gospels, such as –

> "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30** Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **31** And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."
>
> -Matthew 24:29-31

That, in turn, comes from what was written by the prophet Daniel –

> "I was watching in the night visions,
> And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
> Coming with the clouds of heaven!
> He came to the Ancient of Days,
> And they brought Him near before Him.
> **14** Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
> That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
> His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
> Which shall not pass away,
> And His kingdom *the one*
> Which shall not be destroyed." Daniel 7:13-14

Understanding this, John continues with, "and every eye will see Him." This is seen in the reference of Matthew 24:30 noted already. This terminology, although understandable based on the words, could not be fully grasped until modern times. There is no sense of exclusion, such as "every eye in Jerusalem," which would then exclude anyone outside of Jerusalem. In other words, it is an all-inclusive statement.

Every eye will view the coming of Christ. But with the world being a globe (yes, the earth is round), and being 24,901 miles in circumference, the thought of every eye actually seeing Christ at His coming would seem otherwise impossible. However, today, every eye can see any event anywhere in the world at the same time. The entire world's attention will be focused on the coming of Christ in the clouds. Understanding this, John next makes a specific statement, "even they who pierced Him."

These words would be superfluous unless it is speaking of a specific group of people. In other words, scholars have said that this is a general statement concerning those who have rejected Christ. For example, Vincent's Word Studies says –
"The expression here refers not to the Jews only, but to all who reject the Son of Man; those who 'in any age have identified themselves with the Spirit of the Savior's murderers.'"

This is entirely incorrect. Based on the dispensational model, the rapture will have occurred. Thus, every person on the planet who is left behind will have rejected Christ. Though many will come to Him after the rapture, the majority of the planet will continue in their rejection. Therefore, this is speaking of a particular group within those who have rejected Him. It is a clear and unambiguous reference to Zechariah 12:10 which is referring to the Jewish people –

> "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only *son,* and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."

The words of Zechariah refer to Israel, and it is that passage which John is calling to remembrance for this group. The word translated here as "pierced" is only found elsewhere in John 19:37. There, John is referring to the prophecy of Zechariah – a prophecy directed to Israel. Thus, the fact that this is solely referring to Israel is confirmed by what he next says. By opening the next sentence with "And" it shows that a distinction is made between this group and all other groups on the planet. As he says, "<u>And</u> all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him."

The Jewish nation, Israel, are the people who Christ came to. It is they who rejected Him. Regardless of the fact that the Romans did the actual crucifixion, it was because of Israel's rejection of Him that it occurred. As it says in Mark 14 –

> "Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

> **62** Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.'" Mark 14:61, 62

This is an important point clearly demonstrating that the words of John of Revelation are not directed only to Israel. They rejected Christ. Rather, the words are directed to the seven Gentile churches who had received Him. Thus, the claim of hyperdispensationalists that the seven letters to the seven churches are written to a Jewish audience are shown to be completely false. John's clear separation of the categories here demonstrates this.

What is written starting in Revelation 4 is written *about* Israel, but not *to* Israel. As a nation, their understanding of the events which will be foretold will come at the end of the tribulation, not at the beginning. It is the church to whom the book is written. That will continue to be seen as the seven letters to the seven churches are evaluated.

For now, the note that "all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him" is also based on Jesus' words of Matthew 24:30 which are cited above. There will be a difference in mourning, however.

The purpose of the seven years of tribulation is to bring Israel into the New Covenant (see Daniel 9:24-27). When they are shattered as a people, and when there is no hope left for them, they will finally call out to the One they have rejected. When they call to Him as Lord (meaning Yehovah), He will manifest Himself to the world. Jesus says this explicitly –

> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! **38** See! Your house is left to you desolate; **39** for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" Matthew 23:37-39

The mourning of Israel will be one of horror mingled with joy. They will mourn that they had rejected Him for two thousand years, but they will rejoice that He has come to save them. The mourning of the world will be of horror that they had followed the antichrist and that their condemnation is now coming. The few who make it through the tribulation, having rejected the mark of the beast, will be the sheep. They will be separated from the goats. This is referred to by Christ Jesus in Matthew 25:32, 33.

John finishes the verse with, "Even so, Amen." It is a note of acceptance. Understanding that the world is heading into what will be described in the chapters ahead; grasping the

weight of the pain, suffering and death which they record; and contemplating what this means for the future of masses of unredeemed humanity, John acknowledges that it is what is just and right.

Life application: Behold! John's word today brings excitement to the believer, hope to Israel, and woe to those who have rejected or fought against the truth. Revelation is a book of severe warning of the consequences of rejecting God's offer of salvation.

This then is not a happy reunion with people who have longed for His return. Instead, it is the King of the universe come to inflict punishment upon those who have rejected Him, aligned themselves against Israel, and have filled up to the highest measure the wrath of God in themselves. The world which has come against their Creator will face Him for judgment.

If you are not in Christ, this will be your lot. Make the choice today to call out to Him for salvation. He has been patient with the world, but someday – probably soon – the time for this dispensation to end will come. Be ready. Be in Christ!

Lord Jesus, we long for Your coming and Your gathering together the faithful of the ages at the rapture. But we understand that for those who are left behind, times of great woe and tragedy are coming. Please make us to be useful tools of bringing the message of salvation now, before that time comes. Your word is written and will come to pass. May we act now! Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Revelation 1:8

Again, there is a difference in source texts. Placing them side by side will show this more clearly –

> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (NASB et al)
>
> "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (NKJV et al)

The differences, though obvious, do not change any overall theology because all of the titles are used together elsewhere. Understanding these variances, and using the NKJV as the basis for the evaluation, John cites the words of the Lord beginning with, "I am the Alpha and the Omega."

These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, comparable to saying "A to Z" in English or Aleph to Tav in Hebrew. It thus forms an all-inclusive statement. Everything that can be expressed by the language is contained within the letters of the language. This includes the concepts of time, space, and matter. If the concept is explainable by the language, then it is included in this thought because the first and last letters are representative of the whole. Albert Barnes notes –

"Among the Jewish rabbis it was common to use the first and the last letters of the Hebrew alphabet to denote the whole of anything, from beginning to end. Thus, it is said, 'Adam transgressed the whole law, from Aleph (א) to Taw (ת).'"

The Lord next provides an explanation of the meaning of the words, saying, "*the* Beginning and *the* End." The reason this is considered an explanation of the previous words is that they were prefixed by definite articles, whereas in the original Greek the words "Beginning" and "End" are not –

"the Alpha and the Omega – Beginning and End." (Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Α καὶ τὸ Ω ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος).

The words carry the same general weight as those found several times in the book of Isaiah, such as –

> "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
> And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
> 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last;
> Besides Me *there is* no God." Isaiah 44:6

Further, the words carry the same general tone as those of Paul in Colossians 1. There Christ is described as the firstborn over all creation (signifying prior to creation), the Creator, the Sustainer, the head of the church, the firstborn from the dead, and etc. Paul's words were given to show the preeminence of Christ in all things. The words now spoken by Jesus show the absolute existence of Christ – the "I AM THAT I AM." Nothing exists in all of creation apart from Christ Jesus because the existence of all things is derived from His eternal, unchanging existence.

The proclamation continues with, "says the Lord." As noted above, some texts say, "says the Lord God." Whether the word "God" is in the original or not, the intent of the rest of the words speak of deity. They affirm that Jesus Christ is God. Because he is the Beginning and the End, He is also "the First and the Last" (see verse 1:17). As He is, then He is the Lord God of Isaiah 44 (above). He is Yehovah Sabaoth (the Lord of hosts).

However, because the words “Beginning and End” are used in this verse, while the words “First and Last” are used in verse 1:17, some try to say that this verse is speaking of God while verse 1:17 is speaking of Jesus (implying He is not God). This is an error in analysis because in Revelation 22, it says –

> “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work. **13** I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last.” Revelation 22:12, 13

When the Bible is taken as a whole – Old Testament and New – there is only the obvious conclusion that Jesus Christ is the Lord God. He is the incarnate word and the second member of the Trinity. A further confirmation of this comes with the next words of the verse, which say, “who is and who was and who is to come.”

The same phrase is used in verses 1:4, 1:8, 4:8, and 11:17. In them, there is no doubt that they are referring to the same being – God (1:4), the Lord (1:8), and the Lord God Almighty (4:8 & 11:17). But, because all of the other terms of this verse are referring to Jesus here and elsewhere, then Jesus must – by default – be the Lord God Almighty. If not, then the book of Revelation is a blasphemously compiled book of contradiction.

The term itself describes the eternal nature of Christ (who is God). There is no time that He did not exist. He exists now, and He will never cease to exist. The proclamation then finishes with, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, *ho pantokratór*, “the Almighty.”

It is a term used nine times in Revelation, and only elsewhere in 2 Corinthians 6:18. It is derived from two separate words signifying “all” and “rule.” Thus, He is the all-ruling God, absolutely sovereign over His creation. He is omnipotent and almighty. Ascribing such a title to Christ Jesus, if He were not God, would be the highest form of blasphemy. But in understanding who Jesus is – the incarnate Word of God – the title reveals another aspect of His majesty and glory.

<u>Life application:</u> As the titles found in Revelation are ascribed to both God and Jesus, it destroys the claims of those who deny the deity of Christ, including cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses. If the Bible is the word of God (which it is), either Jesus is God, or the book of Revelation is a confused document where God has allowed unbelievably sloppy work to be included in His word.

Jesus is the divine visitor found throughout the Old Testament – the Angel of the Lord who met Abraham at Alon Mamre, Moses at the Burning Bush, Joshua at Gilgal, Gideon at Ophrah, and numerous other visits throughout the Old Testament. He is the Lord of

and above His creation, and He is the One who united with it in order to redeem fallen man. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. He is Jesus.

Nothing could be clearer when the Bible is taken as a whole. God entered into the stream of human existence to restore that which was lost. It is in Jesus Christ that this came about. Let us never fail to bring glory to God by honoring the Son.

Glorious Almighty and ever-present Lord God – our minds cannot grasp the enormity of who You are. You are the Creator who loved us enough to participate in Your creation by uniting with it in human flesh. How can we grasp such an incredibly glorious thing? Surely You have done, are doing, and will continue to do great things for us. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Holy is His name! Amen.

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Revelation 1:9

John has given his introductory salutation, an explanation of who it is ultimately from (meaning the Lord), and he has provided a proclamation from the Lord concerning His very nature. John now returns to an explanation of how the revelation came to him. In this, he follows the prophets of old who likewise received revelation, but who also took the time to then explain how it came about. An example of this is found in Ezekiel 1 –

> "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month,* on the fifth *day* of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the River Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. **2** On the fifth *day* of the month, which *was* in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, **3** the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there."
>
> -Ezekiel 1:1-3

In this same style of receiving the prophetic word, John begins with, "I, John, your brother." John is writing to those of the faith, meaning Christians. The greeting is intended to unite both writer and reader in a fraternal bond in the faith. From there, he says, "and companion in the tribulation."

The word translated as "companion" is one which signifies a fellow partaker in an event. In other words, John is acknowledging the fact that he is a part of the tribulation that he already knows his reader is experiencing.

In other words, the state of tribulation is an expected part of being a Christian. It is not something we are delivered from while in this life. Rather, it is something that goes along with life in Christ. The word signifies an internal pressure that causes a person to feel confined. There is no way of escape while we are in this life.

With that noted, John next says, “and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” Some try to separate the tribulation from the kingdom. In other words, tribulation is of this life, but kingdom anticipates our future life. This is incorrect. The idea of the “kingdom” is one of present participation as well as future expectation.

For example, Paul speaks of the kingdom in relation to believers as “right now” in Romans 14:17, saying, “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” However, he also speaks of it as a future anticipation in 1 Corinthians 15:50, saying, “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.”

Thus, the kingdom John is referring to is the state of existence believers are in at any given time. Hence, he notes along with it, “patience.” Believers possess eternal life and the kingdom right now. And yet, it is not yet realized in its fullness. Thus, there is the need for patience in Christ as we await the consummation of that which is already assured. The words of John harmoniously sync with those of the other apostolic writings in this regard.

With this note of comforting assurance complete, John now begins the specifics of how the revelation was received. He “was on the island that is called Patmos.” Patmos is a small, rocky, and barren island about 60 miles southwest of Ephesus. This is the only time it is mentioned in Scripture. At the time of the writing of Revelation, most likely at the time of Emperor Domitian (AD81-96), it was a Roman isle of banishment. Albert Barnes explains this –

“Lonely, desolate, barren, uninhabited, seldom visited, it had all the requisites which could be desired for a place of punishment; and banishment to that place would accomplish all that a persecutor could wish in silencing an apostle, without putting him to death. It was no uncommon thing, in ancient times, to banish people from their country; either sending them forth at large, or specifying some particular place to which they were to go. The whole narrative leads us to suppose that this place was designated as that to which John was to be sent. Banishment to an island was a common mode of punishment; and there was a distinction made by this act in favor of those who were thus banished. The more base, low, and vile of criminals were commonly condemned to

work in the mines; the more decent and respectable were banished to some lonely island."

For an aged man, this would have been a brutally hard existence. But John's next words make the exile to this lonely spot out to be an honor because it was "for the word of God." This does not mean that he was there to receive the word of God, but rather that he was there because of his proclamation of the word of God.

He, like the other apostles and faithful disciples of Christ, proclaimed Scripture. It is this "word of God" that was deemed to be contrary to the values of the Roman empire, and thus they attempted to have it silenced. What can be inferred here is that if John were martyred for his witness, it would be harmful rather than helpful to that end. Having martyred the other apostles, the word spread forth more, not less. In order to avoid this, John was sent into exile.

John finishes this verse by stating that his exile was also "for the testimony of Jesus Christ." In proclaiming the word of God, he was proclaiming the message of Christ because the entire body of Scripture – both Old and New Testaments – points to Jesus Christ. Jesus stated as much in John 5 –

> "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." John 5:39

And again –

> "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me."
> -John 5:46

The Old Testament proclaimed the Christ to come. From there, the New Testament proclaims the Christ who has come. This is the testimony of John, and it is what led to his exile on the lonely island Patmos.

<u>Life application:</u> John's words speak of 1) tribulation, 2) kingdom, and 3) patience. As Revelation continues, John will address all three of these. Here is how they are explained in the New Testament –

1) *Tribulation* – Never in the Bible is there a guarantee that believers will be free from suffering in this life. In fact, based on the example of the apostles, the opposite can – and indeed should – be expected. Paul explains the purpose of our tribulations –

"And not only *that,* but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; [4] and perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5] Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Romans 5:3-5

2) *Kingdom* – Peter admonishes believers about the kingdom –

"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; [11] for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:10, 11

3) *Patience* – Patience is a product of the testing of your faith. James explains this in his epistle –

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." James 1:2

Though the recipients of these letters are different, all are believers who are partakers of the gospel message which is found in Jesus Christ. John's words are directed to the seven churches, but they are ultimately intended for all believers in Christ to read and understand the message conveyed from God through him.

Lord, we ask that you allow us to glory in tribulations, have patience as we await the consummation of Your kingdom, and maintain fortitude as our faith is tested. We know that we will learn from them if we endure them. In this, we will become well-rounded and faithful Christians. So, if they are to continue, may we learn through what we face, to Your glory! Amen.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, Revelation 1:10

In the previous verse, John revealed that he was on Patmos "for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." It is there that he now reveals how the contents of the book of Revelation were received. He begins with, "I was in the Spirit."

There is no article before "Spirit," and so it is debated whether this means the Holy Spirit or not. Paul writes elsewhere, "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). No article is used there as well, and yet it is generally accepted that he is referring to the Holy Spirit. John was probably praying, praising the Lord, singing out to Him, or

something similar. In this, he was "filled with the Spirit," and thus "in the Spirit" as any believer would be when intimately contemplating his relationship before the Lord. The same term is used again in verse 4:2 where it clearly is speaking of John being presented with a vision.

John says this state was "on the Lord's Day." The Greek word, translated as "Lord's," is *kuriakos*. It is used only here and concerning the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:20. It signifies "pertaining to the Lord." It would be an abuse of the text to assume that John is speaking of the "day of the Lord" as noted in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. Further, verse 4:2 will show this is not the case.

John will be given visions of the day of the Lord after receiving the seven letters to the seven churches. At this time, he is speaking of a specific day – a day set apart to the Lord – just as the Lord's Supper is a meal set apart to the Lord. Thus, it is referring to Sunday – the day the Lord was resurrected. It was, and it continues to be, regarded as such.

If this was the Sabbath, John would have noted it as such (see John 5:9, etc.; see John 20:1, etc.). The first day of the week, as noted in the gospels, later became known as "the Lord's Day" in honor of the most important event in human history – the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is while in the Spirit, and while on Sunday – the first day of the week – that John next says, "and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet." The Greek highlights the magnitude of the voice by saying, "and I heard behind me a voice, great, like that of a trumpet."

It is curious as to why the voice is "behind" John. Tradition holds that he received the apocalypse in a cave. If so, he may have been praying with his face to the wall, as people do. He may also have been lying face down, as people do. One commentator suggests that the symbolism used in Revelation, coming from the Old Testament types and shadows, is being called to memory – thus, the voice is "behind" John.

The great voice like a trumpet speaks of calling a matter to attention. In Isaiah, it says –

> "Cry aloud, spare not;
> Lift up your voice like a trumpet;
> Tell My people their transgression,
> And the house of Jacob their sins." Isaiah 58:1

Isaiah was being instructed to cry out loudly and clearly concerning the people's errant ways. In some places, a voice is accompanied by the blast of a trumpet, such as at the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 19. A trumpet will be sounded at the rapture of the church as is noted in 1 Thessalonians 4:6.

The idea is that of a clear, unambiguous, and purposeful calling forth of a message. The words to be conveyed will not be muttered or mixed, as if he might misunderstand.

Life application: The same God who spoke the universe into existence, who gave the Law at Sinai, and who sent tongues of fire at Pentecost, also spoke to John to reveal His coming words of instruction for His church, and of woe to those who fail to come to Him through Jesus Christ before the coming tribulation period.

Let us pay heed to what is presented in the book of Revelation, carefully evaluating it so that we will be properly trained in what it says. In this, we will be able to competently explain what we know to others in order to bring them to a sound knowledge as well.

Awesome and splendid are You, O God. When You speak, the mountains tremble and hearts become like stone. Your voice controlled the creation, your word sustains us even now, and what You speak determines the future. And so, let us never fail to accept Your word as the rule and guide of our faith, knowing that You are always with Your people through the events that occur in our lives. Our hearts sings praises to You today, our awesome and glorious God! Amen.

saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."
Revelation 1:11

The first chapter of Revelation corresponds to the first letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The first letter, *aleph*, signifies "strong," "power," or "leader." Here, the Leader of the church – Jesus Christ the God/Man begins His words to His church.

As has been (and will be) seen, there are, at times, variations between source texts. This is true with this verse –

> ...saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." (NKJV)

> ...saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” (NASB)

One either added in something, or one dropped something out. However, and despite this, the differences will be made up elsewhere. In other words, the terms dropped in the text used for the NASB translation are included at other points in Revelation and confirm Jesus’ deity. These changes may have been accidental, but if someone intentionally added or deleted the verses, it was most probably not to hide this fact. This is because the precept of Jesus being fully God is undeniable based on countless other verses in the New Testament.

This commentary will continue to use the NKJV and its source text for analysis. With that in mind, this verse continues from the previous verse beginning with, “saying, ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last.’” The word “saying” refers to the voice like a trumpet of the previous verse.

From there, verse 8 already noted Christ as the Alpha and the Omega. To understand that, refer back to that commentary. Verse 8 then said, “*the* Beginning and *the* End.” That is now changed to, “the First and the Last.” All three dual descriptors will be used together in Revelation 22:13 –

> “I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last.”

The word translated as “First” is *prótos*. It signifies “what comes first.” It is that which is principal, most important, etc. The word translated as “Last” is *eschatos*. It signifies “at the last,” “till the end,” and so on. It is the root of the word eschatology, the study of last things.

With that stated, the trumpeting voice of the Lord continues with, “and, ‘What you see, write in a book.’” In the next verse, John will turn to see a vision of the Lord. The Lord will then speak out words to the church in Chapters 2 & 3, at times using the imagery of the vision, explaining it to the churches.

John is being instructed to write out what he sees in order to confirm that the words which accompany the vision are true, because the vision itself confirms it is true. It is similar to what occurred with the prophets of old. Ezekiel 1 is a good example of this. Isaiah 6 gives a vivid description of the Lord as well. What is seen, then, is as important to the reception of the message as is what is spoken.

This is because what is seen is the fulfillment of the typology given in the Old Testament. Moses was given explicit instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and the implements which accompanied it. Hebrews 8 explains this –

> "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer. **4** For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; **5** who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See *that* you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'" Hebrews 8:3-5

A study of the tabernacle and its various implements, including the garments of the high priest, reveals Christ in every detail. To gain a fuller understanding of those details, one can go to the Superior Word YT videos or writings, and follow through the book of Exodus. What John sees, then shows us the heavenly things that the author of Hebrews refers to.

The Lord continues by saying, "and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia." This does not mean these were the only churches in the province of Asia, but that these seven churches have been selected to receive the letter. Thus, it shows that the Lord is choosing them for His own specific purposes, and also in order to reveal certain truths which apply to each of them. They will then become a model for all churches of the church age to be evaluated against. This will reveal the positive and negative aspects of those churches in order to show what is pleasing or displeasing to the Lord.

These are Gentile-led churches in Gentile areas. Like churches today, there may have been Jewish believers at any of them, but that is incidental to the overall Gentile setting that is given. What is written by John is to be conveyed "to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

Seven in Scripture is the number of "spiritual perfection." Knowing this, the idea of these seven churches then reflecting the state of all future churches makes sense. But within the words of the Lord to each church are warnings and promises. As these warnings and promises reflect the Lord's purposes for all churches, it is good to understand the meaning of "seven" from the Old Testament.

It is the Hebrew word is *sheva*. It is derived from the verb *shava* – "to swear," or "an oath." A play on words is seen in the use of both "seven" and "oath" in these words from Genesis 21 –

> "And he said, 'You will take *these* seven ewe lambs from my hand, that they may be my witness that I have dug this well.' **31** Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because the two of them swore an oath there." Genesis 21:30, 31

With this in mind, the words of the Lord to the seven churches should be taken and applied carefully by the reader. What He says is binding, as is testified to by who He is. The description of Him, the words which issue from Him, and the presentation being given to seven churches, all are given to help us realize what is presented is a binding word.

Of these seven churches, only Ephesus and Laodicea are seen outside of Revelation. Ephesus – as a church or as a city – is noted in Acts, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians (it is the city to whom Paul's letter to the Ephesians is written), 1 Timothy, and 2 Timothy. Laodicea is mentioned four times in the book of Colossians. The city of Thyatira is mentioned in Acts 16:14, but only in relation to it being the town of Lydia, a lady mentioned in that verse. Of these seven churches, the Pulpit Commentary notes –

"The order is not haphazard. It is precisely that which would be natural to a person writing in Patmos or travelling from Ephesus. Ephesus comes first as metropolis; then the city on the coast, Smyrna; then the inland cities in order, working round towards Ephesus again. In short, it is just the order in which St. John would visit the Churches in making an apostolic circuit as metropolitan."

<u>Life application:</u> Jesus, as properly presented in the Bible, is God. To deny Jesus' deity is explained by John in his epistles as the spirit of the antichrist. Misdirected faith is wasted faith. It will result in eternal condemnation. So, it is of paramount importance to get right who Jesus is.

Once it is understood that Jesus Christ is God, the words of Revelation can be properly evaluated. The description of Jesus, and the letters which follow, will express the heart of the Lord for His church, meaning the people in it. Let us take them to heart.
Glorious Almighty God! The doctrine of the Trinity is difficult for us to understand, but it is certainly what the Bible teaches. And so, may we accept it and hold fast to it so that our faith will be properly directed and firmly grounded in the truth. We ask this so that You will be glorified through our belief in Jesus, the Lord of Creation and the Lord of the Church. Amen.

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, Revelation 1:12

The previous verses said that John heard a voice behind him like a trumpet. The voice gave John instructions to carry out. In having heard this, it now says, “Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me.” It is an interesting phrase.

Here, the “voice” is given for the source of the voice. As the voice was like a trumpet, he wanted to discern what would produce such a voice, as if the two were one thing. This follows in concept from the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:7, 8 –

> “Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? **8** For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?”

A trumpet produces its own voice, but it can be intelligible or unintelligible. A voice like a trumpet that speaks out intelligible words isn’t a trumpet at all. John wanted to see the voice that spoke with him, and thus he wanted to see what produced the voice. And more, John says the voice spoke “with” him, not “to” him. There is the sense of conversation rather than merely focused direction. And this, even before John has beheld the speaker. This is probably because of what he said in verse 10 – “I was in the Spirit.” John was conversing with the Lord. The Lord has responded. Because of this, John says, “And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands.”

In his turning, John’s mental focus, that of being in the Spirit, is redirected to another plane of perception. His eyes now behold what his ears heard. And the first thing that catches his attention is the seven golden lampstands. The golden lampstand, or menorah, is first seen in Exodus 25. In the construction of the tabernacle, Moses was given precise instructions concerning each article to be made, including where it was to be placed after it was made.

The order received for the furniture within the tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant, then the Table for the Showbread, and then the Golden Lampstand (meaning the Menorah). This implement was kept in the south side of the Holy Place, across from the Table of Showbread.

To understand its amazing typology, one should take the time to watch or read the Superior Word sermon entitled “Exodus 25.31-40 (The Menorah).” The lampstand is referred to again in Zechariah 4:2. However, in the temple built by Solomon, ten separate lampstands were made (see 1 Kings 7:49).

For this verse, John says, “seven golden lampstands.” It is debated if it is one lampstand with seven branches or seven separate lampstands. If only one, then John is seeing Christ standing in front and the seven branches spread out behind him. Or, it could be that there are actually seven separate lampstands just as there were ten separate ones in Solomon’s temple. The text allows for either possibility.

The lampstand will be explained in 1:20. In verse 2:1, it says that the Lord “walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.” In verse 2:5, it says the Lord may remove a church’s lampstand. Therefore, it is more likely that these are separate lampstands.

Either way, the symbolism of the lampstands will be consistent with that given in Exodus. It is an amazing study.

Life application: The King James Version and other archaic translations describe these lampstands as “candlesticks.” We thus lose the symbolism of what is being related. It is always helpful to read multiple translations of the Bible, weeding out error, archaic terminology, and erroneous descriptions in the process.

This is important in order to understand the true intent behind any given passage or verse. Let us be students who stand approved because of our pursuit of the truth as conveyed in God’s precious word.

Lord, You alone have authority over the churches of the world. Any church that rejects You, as You have revealed Yourself in Your word, does so at its own peril. We know that You are watching the conduct of each church, and indeed each person in Your church, monitoring us according to Your wisdom and Your standard of holiness. May we as groups who gather, and as individuals as well, be obedient and faithful to You. Amen.

...and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.
Revelation 1:13

John’s vision, which began in the previous verse, spoke of seven golden lampstands. Now, continuing with that thought, it says, “and in the midst of the seven lampstands.” Although getting ahead of the presentation, it is right to explain the meaning of these lampstands. Verse 20 will say, “the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.”

With this understanding, John then sees a vision of one “in the midst of the seven” churches. The word translated as “midst” signifies “in the middle.” Therefore, this is

probably referring to seven lampstands, rather than one lampstand with seven branches. However, John could be beholding someone standing in front of a seven-branched lampstand. That would appear less likely though.

Either way, there in the midst of them is "One like the Son of Man." This terminology permeates Scripture, and it can be speaking of the Lord, or of a given person. For example, Ezekiel is called "son of man" numerous times in his book. It is a way of specifically identifying the humanity of a person.

Further, there is no article before "Son of Man" in the Greek of this verse. Therefore, it should say, "a Son of Man." However, this does not mean that it is not the Lord. Rather, it is focusing on His humanity. This term, Son of Man, is used of the Lord in both testaments. For example, it is speaking of Him in Daniel 7:13, where the definite article is also lacking in the original (even those placed in the translation) –

> "I was watching in the night visions,
> And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
> Coming with the clouds of heaven!
> He came to the Ancient of Days,
> And they brought Him near before Him." Daniel 7:13

The term will also be used in Revelation 14:14 –

> "Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat *One* like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle."
> -Revelation 14:14

The term "Son of Man" is used again and again by Jesus when refereeing to Himself in the book of Luke. There, to stress His humanity, He uses the article – "the Son of Man." However, in John 5, He says this while leaving off the article –

> "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, **27** and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man." John 5:26, 27

John's vision now is clearly referring to Christ Jesus – the God/Man. However, the focus is first on His humanity. Of Him, it says he is "clothed with a garment down to the feet." The word "feet" is singular – "down to the foot." Thus, it gives the sense of being fully covered. One might paraphrase this as "from shoulder to foot" to get the sense of the words.

This is a clear reference to the tunic worn by the high priest of Israel. The same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament concerning the length is seen in Exodus 28:31. This is the only time this word, *podérés*, is used in the New Testament.

Such a full covering pictures absolute purity and sinlessness. When one is naked, partially or completely, it signifies being exposed. Such exposure represents being in a state of sin. The typology goes back to the garden of Eden where Adam and Eve realized they were naked and tried to cover themselves. Being fully covered, this Son of Man has no exposure, and thus is sinless.

The study concerning the garments and implements of the high priest of Israel shows that every single detail of them points to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Those were types and shadows of the true High Priest of the New Covenant. Unfortunately, the heretical sect known as hyperdispensationalists claims that the symbolism is Jewish and has nothing to do with the church.

This shows a complete misunderstanding of Old Testament typology. The things of the Old anticipate Christ in the New. The garments of Christ, our High Priest, are not relying on those types and shadows. Rather, they are the fulfillment of them. Christ performs His priestly functions (mediating between God and man) based on His status as the Mediator.

To say that Christ is not the High Priest of the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, is to say that Paul's reference to Christ as our Mediator (see 1 Timothy 2:5) has no meaning. It robs the significance of Christ's work, it denies that the New Covenant it a single covenant for all people, and it heretically separates the one gospel of Jesus Christ into two.

To understand the symbolism of this garment, prefigured by that of Israel's high priest, one can refer to the video or written sermons on those passages provided by the Superior Word.

Next, the description continues with, "and girded about the chest with a golden band." This is reflective of the description found in Daniel 10 –

> "I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist *was* girded with gold of Uphaz! **6** His body *was* like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude." Daniel 10:5, 6

Noting this, it continues to show the inaccuracy of the doctrine of hyperdispensationalists. The same symbolism of Christ, even from the Old Testament, shows that what was given to Israel's high priest under the Mosaic Covenant was only anticipatory of the greater things found in Christ.

This *zónén chrysan*, or golden band, reveals both the priestly and kingly offices of the One being presented. The *zóné*, or "band," simply signifies a belt, sash, girdle, etc. At times, it describes a money belt. In this case, because it is about His *mastos*, or literally "breasts," it signifies a band, or sash.

The sash of the high priest of Israel is described in Exodus 28 – all of its details anticipate Christ Jesus. In Isaiah 11:5 and 22:21, a sash is used to describe the coming Messiah, either directly or in typology. In particular, Isaiah 22:21 anticipates a ruler, not a priest. The same is true with Job 12:18 –

> "He loosens the bonds of kings,
> And binds their waist with a belt."

Paul uses the idea of such a girdle in Ephesians 6:14 to indicate binding oneself with truth. Of this Son of Man, His band is gold. It signifies purity and holiness, royalty, and divinity. Thus, even though He is a Son of Man, He is also divine. He is pure and without spot, He is set apart, and He stands in kingly status.

Life application: The garments described in this verse show a uniting of the offices of both High Priest and King into one. This was anticipated in the book of Zechariah –

> "Behold, the Man whose name *is* the BRANCH!
> From His place He shall branch out,
> And He shall build the temple of the LORD;
> **13** Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD.
> He shall bear the glory,
> And shall sit and rule on His throne;
> So He shall be a priest on His throne,
> And the counsel of peace shall be between them both." Zechariah 6:12, 13

Christ Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy. In the New Covenant, He replaces the Aaronic line of Israel's priests, and He fulfills the promise of eternal kingship made to King David. Again, to argue against the intolerably poor doctrine of hyperdispensationalsm, as has already been done above concerning Christ's priestly office, the same is true with His kingly office.

Paul uses the term “kingdom,” again and again, when writing to the Gentile believers. One simple example of this is speaking of the time of the rapture of the church –

> “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” 1 Corinthians 15:50

It would be rather silly to set up a kingdom that had no king. Christ is the fulfillment of the types and shadows of the Old Testament, having become both High Priest and King of a New Covenant – one which is set up for those who accept His one (and only one) gospel. Do not be led astray by the heretical teachings of hyperdispensationalism. Jesus is the Lord and Savior of both Jew and Gentile.

The book of Matthew displays Jesus as the King, and John shows Jesus as the High Priest; both of these are more fully explained in the book of Hebrews. Jesus, who is our Great King and High Priest, is the One who is always in the midst of the church, watching over us and directing us according to His purposes. Those churches who glorify Him will receive their reward; those who fail to do so will be removed from His presence.

He is our God and worthy of our devotion, adoration, and praise.

The Church serves the One true, eternal, and awesome God through the Lord Jesus! It is You, O Christ, who reveals the Father, and it is You through whom the Holy Spirit is given. You are the focus of our faith. You are our glorious and reigning King and our faithful and merciful High Priest who mediates on our behalf. You are most glorious and worthy of all praise! Amen.

His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; Revelation 1:14

Here, John continues with the description of the Lord whom he beheld in His vision, beginning with, “His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow.” Here we have a comparison to that found in the Old Testament. In Psalm 51, David’s sin was uncovered, and he mourned over what he had done wrong. In his words, he said –

> “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
> Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Psalm 51:7

Thus, we have a direct comparison of “whiter than snow” by David to being pure and undefiled; sinless. Isaiah provides a second comparison of what is seen here in Revelation saying –

"'Come now, and let us reason together,'
Says the LORD,
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool." Isaiah 1:18

Not only does Isaiah equate "white as snow" with sinless purity, but he then adds in a like-comparison, saying, "as wool." Scripture has interpreted Scripture. Understanding this, Daniel 7 unites both and uses them to describe not the Son of Man introduced in the previous verse (Daniel 7:13 14), but the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7:9, 10 –

"I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated;
His garment *was* white as snow,
And the hair of His head *was* like pure wool.
His throne *was* a fiery flame,
Its wheels a burning fire;
10 A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him.
A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
The court was seated,
And the books were opened."

What this is telling us is that the Son of Man IS the Ancient of Days. This should be obvious because God cannot be seen. He has no parts. This is the first hint that every revelation of God seen in a physical aspect in the book of Revelation is that of Jesus Christ, revealing the unseen God to us.

That God cannot be seen is supported elsewhere in Scripture, such as 1 Timothy 1:17, 1 Timothy 6:16, and 1 John 4:12. To understand this from a logical perspective, one simply needs to understand that time, space, and matter were all created by God. None can exist apart from the other two. As this is so, God is before His creation and He is outside of His creation. He is not bound by time, by space, or by matter. He is thus pure actuality with no potential to change. Therefore, Jesus Christ – the incarnate Word of God – reveals the unseen God to us. As this is so, any theophany of God is Jesus revealing the unseen God to us. This should be remembered as we proceed through the book of Revelation. The book is the "Revelation" or unveiling of Jesus Christ.

With this understood, there is one other attribute of the white hair that could be logically applied. In Leviticus 19, it says –

> "You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I *am* the LORD." Leviticus 19:32

Also, Proverbs 16 says –

> "The silver-haired head *is* a crown of glory,
> *If* it is found in the way of righteousness." Proverbs 16:31

The intent of these, and other, verses is to show that the gray hair of a person conveys age, wisdom, honor, respect, and righteousness. Therefore, this second connotation certainly applies. Jesus Christ is the Ancient of Days, He is the epitome of Wisdom, He is deserving of the greatest honor and respect, and He is the embodiment of righteousness.

John next says of Him, "and His eyes like a flame of fire." It is a description seen in Daniel 10:6 –

> "His body *was* like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude."

The idea of fire in the Bible is that of judgment, purification, refinement, and so on. The Lord spoke from the midst of the fire when the Ten Commandments were given. It spoke of judgment. Any infraction of the law would be met with it. In Numbers 31:23, fire was to be used for the purification of defiled items.

And Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says the following –

> "Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, **13** each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. **14** If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

> "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. **10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one

may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. **11** Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences."
-2 Corinthians 5:9-11

Believers will come before Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and that which is of no value shall be burned away. The eyes of the Lord will pierce through the days of our lives and the actions of our conduct, and they will purify us for our eternal state. On the other hand, Revelation later says –

"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. **12** His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself." Revelation 19:11, 12

Those who are not found in Christ will be judged with those same burning eyes, and they will be purified through destruction. See Revelation 20:9-15 for a description of their fate. None of this should be a surprise, however. Jude 1:7 says that what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah was given as an example to all of those "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

Life application: As has been the case and will continue to be the case, the argument against Jesus' deity crumbles into emptiness before the words of John as he relates what he sees in the glorious person of Jesus Christ.

Understanding this, the world must view Him from every aspect. He is the Provider of peace, but He is also the Judge of the wicked. He is gracious and merciful, and yet He is holy, pure, undefiled, and righteous. Those who fail to come to Him for salvation are set for an eternal swim in the Lake of Fire. Be ready for the day you stand before God. Call on Jesus Christ and receive His pardon for your sins now. Believe the gospel – Christ died for your sins, O sinner. Let Him wash away your misdeeds and purify you for eternal life in glory.

Lord God, we know that it is by Your righteousness that we are purified, and through Christ our sin is removed. We also know that it is Your penetrating gaze that looks upon our hearts and that knows every deed we do, both good and bad. Because of this, we cannot hide our sin. Instead, we confess it to You openly, asking that You cleanse us, purify us, and restore us to You through the precious blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; Revelation 1:15

John continues with his description of the Lord in all of His glorious splendor. Here he notes that "His feet were like fine brass." He uses a word found only here and in verse 2:18, *chalkolibanon*. It is derived from *chalkos*, meaning "copper" or "bronze," and *libanos*, signifying "frankincense." That is then derived from the Hebrew word *leboonah*, also meaning "frankincense," but signifying "white" based on its root, the verb *laben*, or "to make white." That, in turn, comes from the word *lebanah*, or "brick." The reason for this is that bricks whiten as they are dried or fired in a kiln.

This may seem like an unnecessary rabbit trail into the etymology of an obscure word, but it is not. In understanding the typology from the Old Testament, what is stated about Christ's feet here will make complete sense when the second and last use of *chalkolibanon* is given in Chapter 2. A hint of the reason for this is that bricks in the Old Testament signify works, particularly man's works which are insufficient before God. For example, when the people built the Tower of Babel, they made bricks in order to erect a tower to heaven.

In this, there was a picture of human effort in order to reach God – works based salvation. God rejected that. Therefore, this special word – found only these two times, both of which point to the color of Christ's feet – are referring to judgment on works. The reason for this is that brass (bronze/copper) in the Bible has its own signification.

In the Bible, it mainly symbolizes judgment, but also endurance. This judgment can be positive or negative. If positive, it results in purification and justification. If negative, it results in punishment or even death.

However, there is the truth that in order for there to be positive judgment for a sinful person, then there must be the death of an innocent in his place. Therefore, the positive judgment still carries with it a negative aspect.

This description of Christ's feet in Revelation reflects the same picture that is carried forward from instances in the Old Testament. In Daniel 10:6, it says –

> "His body *was* like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like <u>burnished bronze</u> in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude."

Another time in the Ezra 8:27, two bronze vessels being carried to Jerusalem with the returning exiles are considered as "precious as gold" –

> "...twenty gold basins *worth* a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold."

Taking this into consideration, Thayer's Lexicon says it seems "to have been in the writer's thought" to "compel us to understand *some metal like gold, if not more precious*." This special brass with its unique and magnificent color represents – most especially – judgment on works, and also endurance.

Further, feet are what are used to propel a person, keeping on the right or wrong path depending on where the person directs them. They are the part of the body that picks up defilement while walking, and thus need to be washed as it is picked up. Christ's, however, are presented as instruments of judgment. They are further presented as enduring through all trials and having come through without any defilement.

That is seen in the words, "as if refined in a furnace." The word translated as "refined" signifies "to burn." Being refined in a furnace explains the color derived from the word "white." The heat causes things to whiten in a furnace, burning off all impurity and allowing the metal to be formed or shaped accordingly. In Christ's feet, there is pure judgment, no defilement, and absolute perfection.

John next says of Him, "and His voice as the sound of many waters." This looks to the same verse from Daniel 10 cited above, which said, "the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude." However, the direct citation that John is using comes from Ezekiel–

> "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice *was* like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory."
>
> -Ezekiel 43:2.

Both descriptions speak of a voice that resonates with a multitude of wavelengths coming forth at the same time. What cannot be denied here is that, in Ezekiel, the voice is attributed to "the God of Israel." Therefore, a direct connection is made between Christ Jesus here, and Yehovah – the God of Israel – in Ezekiel. One cannot deny the deity of Christ without first dismissing the very words that reveal who He is.

Concerning this voice, it is necessary to understand the etymology of the word *yam*, or "west" from the Old Testament. For example, in Genesis 12:8, it notes the directions

“west” and “east.” The word for “west” is yam, the same as the word for “sea.” The reason for this is that the Mediterranean, or “Great,” Sea is to the west of Canaan. The land itself forms typological pictures. The word yam comes from an unused root meaning “to roar.” Thus, it is “the roaring.”

Understanding this, the concept of man returning to God is from east to west. Man was cast east of the Garden of Eden. In the tabernacle/temple, the Most Holy Place is in the west. It is the place where the Lord God of Israel resided.

The picture is that of man returning to God from his place of exile, heading once again toward Him where He is residing in the west. This description of “many waters,” gives the sense of the roaring of the sea, crashing and terrifying. It is, again, a confirmation that Christ is the Lord, Yehovah, who occupies the Most Holy Place and whose voice issues forth from there.

His voice goes forth in judgment upon the peoples, or it goes forth as a beckoning call to those who will come to Him.

<u>Life application:</u>

> “How beautiful upon the mountains
> Are the feet of him who brings good news,
> Who proclaims peace,
> Who brings glad tidings of good *things,*
> Who proclaims salvation,
> Who says to Zion,
> ‘Your God reigns!’” Isaiah 52:7.

The feet of Christ carry the message of God’s judgment. For the saved, it is a judgment of salvation leading to rewards and losses. For the unsaved, it is one of condemnation. The message of Christ issues forth on a voice that roars as of many waters. It calls out for wisdom and discernment to be applied by the people of the world. Christ has come! Respond to the call!

There can be no mistaking that John intends for his readers to understand Jesus as the incarnation of “Yehovah” of Israel’s past. He is the Mediator and Advocate for believers between God and man, and He is the image of the invisible God in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He is Jesus. Let us be prepared for our time of judgment by responding to the call of the Lord. May today be that day for those who are wise and discerning.

It is glorious to contemplate Your majesty as described within the pages of Scripture, O Lord. Surely Your glory is above all of creation. It extends beyond the height of heaven and beyond time itself. How wonderful to think that someday we will stand in Your presence and behold Your glory with our own eyes, ever hailing the splendor of the King of kings! Amen.

He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. Revelation 1:16

Again, John continues with his description of Christ, revealing His glory to us. In this verse, he begins with, "He had in His right hand seven stars." In verse 20, he will explain that these seven stars are the "seven angels of the seven churches." That will be reviewed then. For now, the "right hand" is used to denote the position of power.

The hand is the place where activity occurs, and tasks are accomplished. Thus, the symbolism is that these seven stars are within His powerful grasp, and that His purposes are being accomplished through them. Nothing is said of the order in which they are presented to John's eyes, nor how they were displayed. But John clearly saw that there were seven of them, and they were in Christ's powerful right hand.

Next, he says that "out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." The order of the words in Greek is precise, saying, "sword, two-mouthed, sharp." The word translated as "two-edged" is *distomos*. It signifies "two mouthed." The idea of the edge of the sword being described as a mouth permeates Scripture.

In this, the sword is considered a devouring instrument, consuming that which it comes in contact with. Being a mouth, it is then likened to a drinker of blood – meaning it has the ability to take life because the "life is in the blood." Being two-mouthed, it is a consumer of blood at all times. No matter which side is presented, its effect remains the same.

Proceeding from the mouth of Christ, who is the embodiment of truth, it gives the sense that Christ will cut out all that is false and all that is contrary to the truth that is found in Him. The sword is used to describe destruction throughout the Old Testament, and even into the New. Jesus uses the terminology of the sword to describe the fate of the Hebrew people in Luke 21-

> "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Luke 21:24

The presentation of Christ is one that should be terrifying to those who reject Him and His word. To see this sword in action, one can turn ahead to Revelation 19:15-21. In that passage, Christ will dispatch the armies gathered together to make war against Him.

John next says, "and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength." The word translated as "countenance," *opsis*, is rare, being used only by John. It is found in John 7:24, John 11:44, and here. It signifies sight, meaning the act of sight. It is an external appearance. John says that this sight of Christ is like the sun. But more specifically, like the sun shining "in its strength." This would indicate midday. The sun at midday, and particularly in an arid region like the Mideast, is what is being referred to here – a dazzling brightness.

The terminology reaches all the way back to Judges 5 –

> "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD!
> But *let* those who love Him *be* like the sun
> When it comes out in full strength." Judges 5:31

The comparison of the sun to the Lord is found elsewhere as well, such as in 2 Samuel 23:4, Psalm 19:5, and Malachi 4:2. If the face of Christ – His appearance – is as the sun, then it means that what it shines upon is fully illuminated. There is nothing that He will not see. All that is dark or hidden will be brought to light. Jesus spoke of this idea in regard to a lamp. If this is so, how much truer is it with the light of the sun shining forth–

> "Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? **22** For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light." Mark 4:21, 22

With the awesome presentation of Christ now fully seen by John, he will explain his reaction to it in the coming verse.

<u>Life application:</u> Elsewhere in Scripture, the sword is noted as the power of the Spirit of God and also as the word of God, the Bible. These descriptions point to an instrument which is authoritative, powerful, and able to consume anything that comes against it. It is effective in both directions (two-edged) as it can be used:

1) internally in the church for judgment –

"For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God."
-1 Peter 4:17

2) It can also be used externally for destruction of the enemies of God –

"Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations." Revelation 19:15

Concerning the sun, when the Lord appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, His radiant glory blinded him. Human eyes can't perceive the fullness of the glory of God, and this is what Jesus is, the unveiled and infinitely glorious revelation of the unseen God. He is the One who created the universe, the One who sustains the universe, and therefore the One who is more glorious than anything in His creation. He is Jesus.

Lord God, how glorious You are. The descriptions of You in Scripture reveal majestic splendor. But how can words fully describe an infinite? And so, we can only imagine You and Your glory in a limited way. Knowing this, how truly glorious You are! You are worthy of infinite praise. May our hearts never be arrogant towards You, but may we humbly walk in the radiant light of Your glory, ever boasting in You alone. Amen.

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. Revelation 1:17

John, having seen the vision of the Lord, now says what his immediate reaction to what he saw was, stating, "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead." The overwhelming nature of what his eyes beheld astonished him to the point of actually fainting. This type of reaction is seen elsewhere. When Isaiah beheld a vision of the Lord, his reaction was–

"Woe *is* me, for I am undone!
Because I *am* a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts." Isaiah 6:5

Ezekiel is said to have fallen on his face when beholding a vision of the Lord (Ezekiel 43:3). Daniel's reaction to such visions was similar on several occasions, such as-

"And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; but a great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. **8** Therefore I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no

> strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. **9** Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground."
>
> -Daniel 10:7-9

Such reactions are given to show that the presence of the Lord is like an overwhelming horror. Not because the Lord isn't glorious, but because He is glorious. When sinful man comes into the presence of absolute holiness, the realization of his own lowly state is realized. The terrifying nature of what must come upon us in our judgment is suddenly realized. This is why Paul says concerning these things-

> "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. **11** Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences."
>
> -1 Corinthians 5:10, 11

This is speaking of saved believers; the redeemed of the Lord. And yet, Paul speaks of "the terror of the Lord." Our joining with Christ is to be one of eternal joy, but our judgment will first sift out all that is of no value. When we are purified through this judgment, only then will what remains be set for the eternal state of glory.

Despite John's reaction, and despite what we must face in our own judgment as believers, John next provides words of comfort, saying, "But He laid His right hand on me." The right hand is the symbol of authority, power, and rule. And yet, instead of striking John with it, the words note that the Lord tenderly laid it on him. Something similar is also seen in Daniel 8 –

> "Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me, and stood me upright." Daniel 8:18

In the act of laying His hand on John, the Lord also gave him words of wonderful comfort, saying, "Do not be afraid." It is, again, similar to what occurred after Daniel swooned in Daniel 10 –

> "Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and *on* the palms of my hands. **11** And he said to me, 'O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.' While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling.'"
>
> -Daniel 10:10, 11

Like Daniel, John was overwhelmed by what he saw, knowing that his just due for being in the presence of pure holiness was to be destroyed. But because of the mercies of the Lord to His redeemed people, he had already been set apart for pardon of sin and purification through Christ. Despite his fallen state, he would be glorified. As Paul says elsewhere –

> "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:1

Judgment of purification lies ahead, but judgment for salvation has already been obtained. As a note of surety concerning this, the Lord then said to John, "I am the First and the Last." This same proclamation is spoken by the Lord (Yehovah) three times in the book of Isaiah. It is found in Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, and 48:12. In fact, in Isaiah 44:6, He says –

> "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
> And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
> 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last;
> Besides Me *there is* no God." Isaiah 44:6

How can this be when this same description is spoken concerning Jesus three times in Revelation (here, Revelation 2:8, & Revelation 22:13)? That this is without a doubt referring to Jesus is because here and in 2:8 it adds on a note that He was dead, but is alive. And in Revelation 22 it specifically says in the same context, "I, Jesus." The answer must be that Jesus is the incarnate Lord. He is the One and only God, and the second member of the Godhead. To say otherwise is to say the Bible is contradictory.

Christ is before all things and He is the end purpose of all things. As He is God, His existence is the source for everything else. As He is the only God, no other God exists or will exist after Him. As such, He is the judge and end of all matters. What He determines, no one can thwart or call into question.

The Lord's words to John, "Do not be afraid," are based on His proclamation that He is "the First and the Last." However, understanding why that should lead him to not be afraid continues to be explained in the next verse. Stay tuned. Good news is one verse away.

<u>Life application:</u> John was completely overwhelmed by the vision he saw of Christ and it mentally. This appearance was similar to one John had witnessed many years earlier as a young man. When Jesus took Peter, James, and him up on a mountain alone, they saw

Him transfigured – a slight foretaste into the glory to come. However, this appearance in Revelation 1 reflects the full glory of the Risen Christ in His entire splendor. John was completely overwhelmed by what he saw.

Both Daniel and John were considered "beloved" of the Lord, both were given the blessing of seeing the Lord of creation, and both were told to not be afraid. The power of God in Jesus Christ is ultimately one of comfort for the believer. As this is so, we should live for Him now, knowing that we will be judged for rewards and loss, but that when that is done, we will be in His presence forever and ever, contemplating the glory of our Creator.

He is before all things and He holds all things together by the power of His word. He is the Lord of the universe and the Lord of His people. He is Jesus.

Lord, because of You, and because of what You have done for us, we can have no fear. Trials cannot overcome us, pains are a temporary inconvenience, and death cannot hold us. We know that we are safe in the power of Your right hand and that nothing in all of creation can separate us from You. All of our hope, all of our trust, and all of our confidence is in You alone. You are great and greatly to be praised. Amen.

I am **He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.** Revelation 1:18

In the previous verse, Jesus spoke forth, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last." John had fallen "at his feet as dead." He was so overwhelmed that he couldn't believe he could continue living. That thought probably brought a moment of fear to his mind. Jesus understanding this said, "Do not be afraid." What He will now say follows on with the words, "the First and the Last." He begins with, "I am He who lives."

The Greek literally reads, "and the Living *One*." In other words, it is not a separate sentence, but is connected to the previous verse –

> "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last, and the Living *One*." (BLB)

John fell as if dead. Would that be the end of Him? What if it really was. But Christ proclaims that He is the Living *One*. John saw Him crucified. He saw Him after the resurrection. And He saw Him ascend to heaven. Now, He sees Him in all of His radiant glory. I AM THE LIVING *ONE*!

Having said that, He then says, “and was dead.” The Greek rather reads, “and became dead.” He is the Living One, but He became dead. Many verses come to mind, but two will give the sense of what is being conveyed –

> “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” John 1:4

> “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself
> and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.”
> -Philippians 1:8

Despite being the Living *One*, Christ was willing to give that up through His incarnation and crucifixion. He “became obedient *to the point of* death.” This was a substitutionary death for those who were already dead, spiritually cut off from God, and who were destined to die physically as well. But, despite becoming dead, the magnificent words of Christ continue, saying, “and behold, I am alive forevermore.”

The Greek states it in a superlative way, “to the ages of the ages.” He is alive and that shall never end. For all eternity, the life He possesses He shall continue to possess. He is THE LIVING *ONE*. With that stated, He proclaims “Amen.” So bet it. It is and it shall never be otherwise. Of this, Charles Ellicott states, “There are two wonders here: the living One becomes dead, and the dead One is alive forevermore.”

Because of this, something was gained. As Jesus says, “And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” Some manuscripts have them reversed – “of Death and Hades.” The words here hearken back to Isaiah 22 when speaking of Eliakim the son of Hilkiah –

> “The key of the house of David
> I will lay on his shoulder;
> So he shall open, and no one shall shut;
> And he shall shut, and no one shall open.” Isaiah 22:22

To have the keys to something means that one has full and unfettered access. Death and Hades were as if prisons. Men would die and they would remain dead, the pit or Sheol in Hebrew, would swallow up the souls of man, and there was no hope to be released from its grip. But Christ, through His work, opened both, using the keys that He had merited through His sinless perfection. Death could not hold Him, but more – because His death was a substitutionary death (dying for others and not for His own sin) – death can no longer hold those who are saved by Him.

He went into the grave, taking the sin of His people with Him. When He came out, that sin remained in the grave. Because the wages of sin is death, and because the sin of His people is carried away, His people are granted life – the same eternal life that He possesses. His redeemed can never die again. It is a note of the absolute assurance of the doctrine of eternal salvation.

Life application:

1) "He who lives" is certainly a reference to the "Living God" of the Old Testament. It is a term used no less than 12 times when speaking about the God of Israel – "Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." 1 Samuel 17:36. The Living God is the eternally existent God who breathed the breath of life into man.

2) "And was dead" identifies Jesus with the most feared and final of human experiences. Death is the result of and payment for sin; it is what humans receive – all humans. It is a final tragic end that results in separation from the Creator who is perfect and sinless.

3) "And behold, I am alive forevermore" is the greatest note of victory ever penned. Peter explained how it happened when speaking in Acts 2:24 – "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." Because death is the result of sin, and because Jesus never sinned, it was "not possible" for death to hold Him; prevailing over death was the only possible option for the sinless Son of God.

4) "Amen" means "truth" and, when spoken by Jesus, who is the embodiment of truth, there is not only a calm certainty in the statement, but the confident backing from the Creator that it can be trusted.

5) "And I have the keys of Hades and Death." Hades is the repository for disembodied spirits, like a holding chamber of the dead. Toward the end of Revelation, a Great White Throne judgment is described in exacting detail. Once the dead of the ages have been judged there, both Hades and Death will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

   After this, there will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain for those who are granted eternal life through Jesus Christ. This verse clearly teaches that the eternal destiny of all humanity is completely under the jurisdiction of Jesus Christ – only He prevailed over death. There is no other way to avoid hell than through

Him. He holds the key to death, He is the judge of man, and He is the eternal hope and joy of the believer. He is Jesus.

The victory is won through the work of Jesus. Now death and hell have no power over the sons of Adam. Instead, Jesus holds the keys to them. We know that by faith in His work we are saved from both. Glory to God in the highest – Jesus was victorious! Amen.

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. Revelation 1:19

Some manuscripts include the word "therefore," saying, "Write, therefore, what you have seen." Thus, the thought is based on what was just given concerning John's vision of Christ, the descriptions of Him in that vision, and His proclamations concerning Himself. However, even without the word "therefore," this verse flows naturally in thought. John has had a vision and he has heard the words. Now, he is given explicit instruction concerning why Christ has manifested Himself. It is so that John will document everything that he hears and sees.

In this, Jesus tells him to write out three specific things based on a sequence of time. The book of Revelation, like other biblical books, can be divided in a various number of ways. It can be divided into chapter/verse divisions, topically, chronologically, or even as based on the Hebrew aleph-bet (see the Introduction commentary), etc.

One way of dividing the book, and indeed the principal way to do so because it is directed by the Lord, is given in this verse –

1) The things which you have seen.
2) The things which are.
3) The things which will take place after this.

This may seem cryptic, especially when it was written almost 2000 years ago, but it is a logical and carefully worded exhortation directly from Christ Jesus and so is to be thoughtfully evaluated. Such an evaluation needs to be carefully considered, especially because the words translated as "after this," which are *meta tauta* in Greek (literally "after these"), are repeated nine times in the book.

The context of this revelation, and how it pertains to God's redemptive workings in human history, needs to be considered. Jesus is speaking to John. It is this moment that is the focal point of the command for John to write. Therefore –

1) “The things which you have seen” is speaking of everything from verse 1:1 to 1:18. Jesus is directing John to write down the things that he has seen up until the moment that He now speaks. It is that which opened the book to us.

2) “The things which are” is a definite amount of time based on some event in God’s redemptive history. For John, the context is the Church Age, also known as the Dispensation of Grace. Jesus was speaking to John who was a part of that dispensation, just as all members of the church are.

There is no reason to assume anything else is being considered. All of the writings, from the resurrection of Christ at the end of the gospels, through Acts, and through the epistles, is directed to the church age. Some of the writings anticipated the end of the church age (such as the rapture verses of 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4), and some anticipate what happens after that (the Judgment Seat of Christ, the glory that lies ahead, and so on), but these writings were given in the context of the church age. But, as we know, there is a point when the church age will end.

At that time, God will unfold a new part of the redemptive narrative. It is 3) “the things which will take place after this.” As we can determine the church age from the book’s own content, then we can determine what will come after it.

The time of the church age is the focus of Jesus’ words from Revelation 1:1 until Revelation 4:1. It is mentioned directly or indirectly numerous times during these verses. That verse, Revelation 4:1, begins with the same words, *meta tauta*, or “after these.”

From that point on, starting with Revelation 4:2, a sudden change takes place in the narrative and the church is never mentioned again until Revelation 19:14. At that time, the church returns *with* Christ at the end of the Tribulation Period. Therefore, “the things which will take place after this” begins at Revelation 4:2 and continues on from there.

To state that this is otherwise is to do damage to the obvious context of what Christ Jesus says in this verse now.

<u>Life application:</u> Replacement theology says that the church has replaced Israel. Thus, it dismisses what is obvious concerning the timeline presented in this verse by Christ. With this view, what is presented later in Revelation has no sound footing, and it dismisses the covenant promises of the Lord to the people known as Israel.

The heretical doctrine of Hyperdispensationalism says that the letters to the seven churches are not written to those in the church age, but to Jews after the rapture. Again, that abuses the obvious intent of John's words now.

These and other such views are based on presuppositions, mostly concerning the Jewish people, that are found to be entirely incorrect when evaluated properly. Understanding the nature of God and the nature of His covenant promises will help students of the Bible not fall into such error. In understanding His faithfulness to Israel – despite their unfaithfulness – we can then be reassured of His faithfulness to us when we likewise fail Him.

Let us trust the promises of God, even when we fall short of the commitment we have made. He will not. The time of the church age will be over soon enough, and He will bring His people to the glory He has promised them, despite themselves! And, from looking around us in the world, that glorious day may be soon!

Lord God, praise You for Your kind hand upon Your people. We call to You through Christ for salvation, and You grant it. We fail You, but You remain faithful. We are anxious until we pick up Your word and find that we are secure. And then, we rest again in Your faithfulness. Thank You for Your word which comforts us and reminds us that You have saved us, and continue to save us, despite ourselves. Thank You for Jesus our Lord. Amen.

The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. Revelation 1:20

John is in the process of writing "the things which are" from the previous verse. That is now explained by the Lord, saying, "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands." In the Greek, there is a difference in these words than of those in verse 1:16. There it said, "in His right hand." Here, it says, "upon My right hand." Thus, it appears as if His hand is open, and resting upon it are these seven stars.

The word "mystery" does not signify something unknowable. Rather, it signifies something that cannot be known until it is revealed. For example, the gospel, the rapture, the uniting of the church with Christ, and so on, were called mysteries by Paul. None of those things could be known apart from them being revealed by God.

So it is true with this. Jesus has these objects which typologically represent something else. In the Old Testament, there was a menorah, a table of showbread, an altar of incense, the veil, the Ark of the Covenant, and so on. All of those things were merely types and shadows of other things found in Christ. For example, the veil is said explicitly in Hebrews 10:20 to be the flesh of Christ. The meaning of the implements is unknown, and it cannot be known without God revealing it. But now, Christ is going to do so.

In this, He says, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." The translation is not correct. In the Greek, there is no article before "churches." It says, "The seven stars are the angels of seven churches." The general nature of the words provides us with insight into the fact that what will be said to them is a generalization of any church at any given time which will then fall into one of the seven categories set forth by the Lord. There were many more churches than just these seven at John's time, but the Lord selected these for His specific reasons.

Next, the word "angels," in both Hebrew and Greek, signifies "messengers." It can speak of divine or human messengers. In this case, there are quite a few possibilities as to what is being referred to. A few for reference are:

1) Heavenly beings. The term is certainly used this way many times in Revelation and elsewhere in the New Testament. But this then begs the question as to why John would be instructed to write to these beings to repent, or refer to them in human terms such as being "alive" and "dead" (meaning in a spiritual sense), and so on? Heavenly angels do not control churches, nor do they communicate with churches. Angels are ministering spirits as described in Hebrews, but John would not be writing such things to a ministering spirit.

2) The angels are actually a representation of the church itself. In other words, John is writing to a church that is represented by the people in the church. However, this is shown to be incorrect because the churches are called "the seven lampstands" in this verse. Therefore, they are two separate entities. Further, this is again confirmed in verse 2:5 where the Lord says that unless certain action is taken, He will take the lampstand away. The address is in the singular, meaning to the "angel."

3) The angels are the leaders of the individual churches. This is not without precedent. In Daniel 12 it says this of proper teachers –

4) "Those who are wise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,

And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever." Daniel 12:3

Similarly, such a term is used of false teachers in Jude –

"These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; **13** raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

-Jude 1:12, 13

Therefore, this is the most likely meaning of the word "angels" here, and thus a better translation for the verse would be "messenger." This is how the word in Hebrew, *malak*, is translated in Malachi 2:7 when speaking of the priest in Israel –

"For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge,
And *people* should seek the law from his mouth;
For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts."

The seven "stars," symbols of authority, represent the seven leaders of the church. They are the messengers of the word of God and the gospel message to the body of believers.

Understanding this is the case, the next words of Jesus are, "and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches." Again, the translation is incorrect. There is no article before "churches." It should read, "and the seven lampstands which you saw are seven churches." Again, the generalization is given to avoid misanalysing what is being conveyed. Error has arisen in many commentaries because of the improper inserting of a definite article which does not belong in the text.

It is certain that all true leaders are under the authority of Christ. Likewise, all true churches – even with their many problems – are a part of the one true church. The representation of Christ having seven stars in His right hand, and also walking among the seven golden lampstands, must be taken as symbolic of all true leaders and all true churches throughout the church age. Seven then – the number of spiritual perfection – is given to represent all of the true church.

The seven lampstands represent the churches. As a lampstand issues forth light, so the churches are intended to issue forth light as well. This is the intent of what is said. And this is exactly how Paul explains the gospel in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 2 Timothy 1:10,

meaning “light.” The church is the focal point for where that gospel message is to be proclaimed.

Life application: After this verse, there are only 21 exciting chapters left. The coming pages are gloriously filled with the splendor of God, the majesty of Jesus Christ, and the judgment of the ages coming upon an unrepentant world. In the midst of this is the salvation of God’s long-wayward and yet beloved people Israel.

Before that, there will be the letters to review that John has been instructed to write. Of those churches, a lot of negative words from Jesus will be conveyed to its leaders. However, having lampstands indicates that the churches are accepted by Jesus as functioning properly, at least to some degree. A lampstand is intended to give light. If a church is failing to be a light as intended, then the lampstand is removed.

This has certainly occurred over the ages as individual churches fail to properly preach and teach the gospel. When a church apostatizes, or “falls away” from the truth, it is no longer a valid church and its lampstand is removed; it becomes a haunt of darkness and uncleanliness. Be sure to evaluate the church you are in right now. Is it following the Bible? Is it straying? Has it completely left the Lord’s commands? Take time to evaluate where you attend and, if necessary, make the move to a congregation the Lord would approve of.

Lord Jesus, in Your hand is all of the rule and authority over Your church. Help the churches that we attend to be properly functioning ones that will bring You and Your glorious gospel the honor it is due. Help us to be responsive to the needs of our congregations, and to be people who will help keep our churches in line with Your word. May it be so to Your glory. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,
'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: Revelation 2:1

The second chapter of Revelation corresponds to the second letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The second letter, *beth*, signifies "family," "house," or "in." Here, the house of God, the church begins to be specifically addressed through individual letters.

As was noted in the previous verse, which closed out Chapter 1, the word "angel" is certainly to be taken as "messenger" and signifying the leader of the congregation. Understanding that, Chapter 2 begins with a note "To the angel of the church of Ephesus."

The word "church" as used already, and as is used here, is from the Greek word *ekklésia*. It signifies an assembly or a congregation. It comes from two words signifying "called out." In this, it is especially signifying those who have been called out from the world and to the fellowship of His kingdom through the gospel.

The church of Ephesus was a real, historical church first mentioned in Acts 18:19. The church began with Paul's standard entry into the local synagogue to reason with the Jews. Eventually, the church departed from the synagogue and took up its meetings at the school of Tyrannus, being comprised of both Jews and Greeks.

The church ultimately became a predominantly Gentile congregation as is evidenced by Paul's words in Ephesians 2:11 where the focus is on Gentiles. And yet, the words of Paul there show that it is one gospel shared between Jew and Gentile. It is important to understand these facts so that one does not fall into the heresy of hyperdispensationalism.

That same church continued on at the time of John, and it is this church whom Jesus addresses first in His words to "seven churches" (as stated in the previous verse). To know more about the area of Ephesus, and some of the cultural and geographical history of the location, a review of the commentary of Albert Barnes or Vincent's Word Studies will provide many details.

Understanding who is being addressed, Jesus next states, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand." Stating this first, just as He opens the letter, is

to show that the leader of the church is right within the power of His grasp. Christ is the Head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18). Therefore, whatever occurs in relation to the church falls under His control. This does not mean that He is responsible for the events, but that He has the power to take action concerning all that occurs. This is certain based on the content of the letters.

Further, the word translated as "holds," means "to place under one's grasp." Thus, it signifies to put under control. For example, it is the word used when John the Baptist was arrested. The ultimate control of the church, meaning any recognized church at any time, is under the power and authority (symbolized by the right hand) of Jesus Christ.

Jesus continues the verse next, saying, "who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands." As noted in the preceding verse, the seven lampstands "are seven churches." We are being given symbolism of the state of any church at any given time, represented by seven generalized churches. Each is called forth as an example of any church with similar problems.

The verb in this clause is a present participle, "walking." He is actively coursing through the churches, not sitting around waiting for angels to give him a report every 30 days. It is a note which should be taken to heart. The things that go on in a church are being watched and evaluated at all times. We may forget that the Lord is there, but that does not mean the Lord is absent. He is actively searching out what occurs in His church in Sarasota, Florida, and He is actively searching out His church in Vientiane, Laos. If it is a true church, the Lord is evaluating it.

With this introductory verse of the seven letters to seven churches, it is a good time to note the similarity of all seven letters in the following verses. The Pulpit Commentary notes that placing each side by side will reveal the following six generalities. They say –

"These common elements are:

1) Christ's command to the seer to write;
2) his title, which in most cases is taken from the descriptions in Revelation 1; the praise, or blame, or both, addressed to the angel, based in all cases on intimate
3) personal knowledge – 'I know thy works;'
4) the charge or warning, generally in connection with Christ's coming;
5) the promise to the victor;
6) the call to each individual to give ear."

Life application: After this opening, the letters (with two exceptions – Sardis and Laodicea) have a word of commendation, and then a note about the state of the church which leads to a word of correction (with the exception of Smyrna and Philadelphia where no correction is noted). After any correction, a note of encouraging approval and a challenge to persevere is normally given to close out the letter.

This style of writing can be equated with a sandwich. The bread is at the beginning and the end, and anything you may or may not like is in the middle. This type of letter eases into correction and eases out of it, and is a good way of dealing with difficult issues. In the cases where no easing in (or out) occurs, it is because the church is in such a bad state that any commendation may be taken as approval when no approval is due. As these letters represent problems systemic throughout the church age, we can easily determine what type of church we are in when compared to these seven letters.

Look around you as you attend your church. Have you allowed perversion to creep in? It is addressed in these letters. Have you allowed wealth and comfort to replace a heart for Jesus? It is in these letters. Unfortunately, we can normally see deficiencies in other churches better than we can in our own. Jesus holds the stars in his hand – they are under His authority. Jesus also walks among the churches, noting deficiencies, commending, rebuking, and so forth. He is ready to remove the lampstand from whatever church turns away from the truth of His gospel and His word.

Lord Jesus, we are Your people and the sheep of Your pasture. Please bring to our attention the deficiencies in the churches that we attend, and put it in the hearts of Your people to correct those areas that are weak. May we strengthen that which is acceptable and good. Thank You for being attentive to the state of each church and each individual as well. Amen.

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; Revelation 2:2

Jesus, addressing the church at Ephesus, now provides them with a compliment. The church in Ephesus is unique in that it is the only church detailed in three different locations in the New Testament. It is mentioned in Acts 18:18-19:41, it is the addressee in an epistle of Paul, and it is addressed as one of the seven letters to seven churches here in Revelation.

These positive words of the Lord can be broken down into five thoughts. The first one is, "I know your works." This is a common theme for all seven churches. It is Jesus' way of saying, "I know what you are doing – whether good or bad, whether of faith or not, etc."

Nothing is hidden from Him, and the words are intended to convict them of this. It reflects the "eyes like a flame of fire" that were noted in the first chapter. His eyes pierce through all things, seeing what we may think we can hide. The word "works" simply speaks of actions that carry out a desire or purpose.

The Lord knows what the churches have been doing in this regard. For now, knowing their works, He next continues with, "your labor." The word carries with it a sense of toil, and by implication the things that come along with that, such as pains and weariness. He knows what they labor at, and He is approving of it.

Next, He notes, "your patience." This word signifies perseverance, steadfastness, and so on. The word "constancy" comes to mind. They remain unswerving in their ability to wait. However, this patience is not without limits. The Lord positively states concerning this "that you cannot bear those who are evil." In other words, their patience is correctly directed, and will not stand for evildoers. It is a high mark of commendation to note an attribute such as patience, and yet to note what that patience will not tolerate. This then is what is reflected in Johns own words –

> "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; **11** for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."
>
> -2 John 1:10, 11

The Lord next says, "And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not." An apostle is someone sent by another. If they claimed to be apostles of Christ, it means they have claimed that they were sent by Christ. At the late date of the writing of this letter, it is surmised that only John was left of those designated apostles. But even if the word is more broadly used, such as "an apostle of John," which someone could claim, those at Ephesus were diligent to test them and see if it was true. They immediately rejected those who were not.

With that stated, the verse finishes with, "and have found them liars." Regardless of who they claimed sent them, the Ephesians were careful to reject any who did not present a true message. This is reflected in the warning of Paul to the Corinthians –

> "But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of

which they boast. [13] For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. [14] And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. [15] Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." 2 Corinthians 11:12-15

The Ephesians were able to spot such people and reject them. Their claims were found false.

Life application: Taking some of the Lord's points directed to the Ephesians, we can consider our own state in relation to them. At times, the fruits of our labors don't come quickly, and we tend to fall away from the effort because it appears there is no reward for the task. However, striving patiently will usually end in seeing maturity of those fruits. Such was the case in Ephesus.

Also, how many churches, in an attempt to be "inclusive," allow perversion, greed, idolatry, etc. to enter into their fellowship? We need to be careful to never allow even the slightest amount of yeast to enter into our doctrine or into our fellowship.

Concerning the testing of those who claimed to be apostles, or have any other type of authority, we need to size them up, listening carefully as visiting people speak. We need to then check what they have said against the standard, meaning Scripture.

As a summary, we can –

1) Strive to emulate that which is commended in Scripture, and

2) Stand against false doctrine and false teachers. But unless we know our Bibles well, these things are impossible to accomplish. And so, we are to be well-grounded in its teachings.

Lord Jesus, Your word tells us of the things You hold as commendable in the church. Help us to remember these things, and then to act upon them in our own congregations – assisting in right deeds and labors, being patient in what we do, standing up against evil, and testing visitors' words and actions against Scripture. May You be pleased with how our churches are run. Amen.

...and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Revelation 2:3

In the previous verse, there were five commendable points in the Ephesian church – their works, labor, patience, intolerance of evil, and testing of those who proclaimed to be apostles. Jesus now turns these around and restates His words in a positive way concerning the fortitude of those who have so conducted themselves.

Taken together they read –

> "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; **3** and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary." Revelation 2:2, 3

In seeing this, the words can be more clearly evaluated. Jesus begins with, "and you have persevered." The word gives the sense of bearing a burden. They had picked up the load they had been charged with and carried it. What is borne is debated. Whether it was the accusation of false teachers (as noted in the previous verse, they would not tolerate evil and may have faced accusation because of it), persecution from others, or the heavy weight of the labors of the ministry, they were faithfully faithful to not only lift the load, but to continue with it despite its weight.

From there, it next says, "and have patience." It is the same word found in the previous verse, also translated as "patience." As seen, the word signifies perseverance, steadfastness, and so on. One could rightly think of "constancy." They remained unswerving in their ability to exhibit patience.

It next continues with, "and have labored for My name's sake." This looks to the previous verse where Christ acknowledged their labors. The words now explain that they were done for the sake of His name. In other words, whatever labors they accomplished as a body, some of which may have been the same type found in any general setting, these were openly acknowledged as being done for Christ's name and not simply for the normal advancement of human life.

In this, they not only labored, but they "have not become weary." The normal pattern of human labor is to work until tired, and then give up. However, instead of allowing the toil to wear them out, they remained invigorated and steadfast in their efforts. Charles Ellicott succinctly states it as, "They had toiled on to very weariness without wearying of their toil." This is the correct sense of what is stated.

<u>Life application:</u> Those at Ephesus continued on despite what must have been long, tedious, or difficult circumstances. It is what perseverance implies. It is like continuing

up the side of a mountain after the point of exhaustion is reached. The goal is what matters.

Further, through their struggles for His name's sake, they waited patiently for the fruits of the labors to be realized. Instead of losing heart and getting redirected to something less important, they waited with the assurance of the coming actualization of their efforts.

And the perseverance and patience they demonstrated was reflected in their tireless efforts. This is highly commendable in any situation because fatigue and frustration can easily tire out the strongest athlete in any type of race, but this was a race of the highest order – for the name of Jesus. In this, they followed Paul's example in 1 Corinthians 9 –

> "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it.* **25** And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown.* **26** Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. **27** But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Christ found these things commendable in the church at Ephesus. As this is so, He will find the same attributes commendable in our conduct as well. Let us heed what the Lord says, and then let us apply these positives to our own actions.

Thank You Lord for the positive examples of perseverance and endurance that are given in Scripture. In reading them, we can know how to act as well. Certainly, the things You have found commendable there will also be found worthy in us. And so, may our hearts desire to apply these lessons to our conduct in all we do. In this, we will be pleasing in Your sight, and will be commended by You on the day You evaluate our lives! Amen.

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Revelation 2:4

The Lord, speaking to the church at Ephesus, has provided two verses of compliments to them for their efforts. However, He now notes a negative aspect of their conduct, saying, "Nevertheless." He has been speaking well of them, but this introduces words for their correction. That is firmed up by saying, "I have this against you."

The word "this" isn't in the Greek. It simply says, "Nevertheless, I have against you that..." The directness of the statement ignores that it is one thing or ten things. It

simply forces the mind to consider that, despite all the good things they have been commended for, the Lord is not pleased with the direction they are heading. One issue can be considered "a little leaven" as Paul calls it in 1 Corinthians 5 (and again in Galatians 5). And as he says both times, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump."

The Lord expects what He has to say to be corrected. Doing more good works in other areas will not cure what is wrong, nor will it cover it over. The yeast will spread, and the entire church will be destroyed. And the thing that He finds deficient is "that you have left your first love."

The words go back to what occurred with Israel in the Old Testament where the Lord said to Jerusalem through the prophet Jeremiah –

> "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD:
> "I remember you,
> The kindness of your youth,
> The love of your betrothal,
> When you went after Me in the wilderness,
> In a land not sown."'" Jeremiah 2:2

The word Jesus uses, *aphiémi*, gives the sense of abandoning, leaving, neglecting, and so on. What had happened is that their labors, attention to doctrine, and so on that are noted in the previous two verses became what consumed their time and energy. This was so much the case that they had actually neglected their love for the Lord who saved them in the first place.

What may be the case is that many years earlier, the last time that they had seen Paul, he gave them this final note of instruction –

> "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:35

The word for "weak" can mean physically or spiritually. Prior to Paul's letters, it is always used in the gospels and Acts as indicating those who are physically weak, diseased, sick, and so on.

It is just speculation, but for all we know, they may have gone back to the town after meeting with him and said, "we need to set up a ministry to support the weak, just as Paul said." In this, they diligently set forth to do what was right, but got so caught up in

the ministry that they forgot the purpose of the ministry – to proclaim the gospel and to love the Lord who first loved them.

In fact, Paul's final words to them in his epistle said, "Grace *be* with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen" (Ephesians 6:24). They had, in fact, failed to take that closing statement to heart. In their zeal to do good works, they had forgotten their first love. Their efforts became the focus, and a social gospel took over. In essence, "We will do good in order to be considered good."

But, without Christ Jesus in the mix, and without a heart dedicated to Him, their efforts were slowly becoming mere vanity. This needed to be correct before they completely departed from any real relationship with the Lord of the church.

Life application: Getting notes of approval and encouragement is always exciting and uplifting. Here comes the boss, telling you in front of everyone else that you've been doing great things for the company while you brim with pride and confidence. And just then he stops and says, "Nevertheless…"

The Ephesians must have read the first few sentences and thought they were in tight with the Lord – "Look at our works, our labor, our patience, our doctrine, and our perseverance. We've dotted every 'I' and crossed every 't!'" But Jesus says that with this type of discipline and stamina, they had let something far more valuable slip to the wayside, love for Him."

The church was so heartily into doing good deeds, helping others, taking care of needs, checking the visitor's doctrine, and moving forward in self-confident assurance, that they'd forgotten the very heart and purpose of all of their labors – Jesus Christ. As you think on this, don't say to yourself, "That will never happen to me." If you look back and carefully analyze your situation, it may have already happened.

Bible study is meant to reveal Christ to us, not to become a match where we out-study, out-learn, and out-do everyone else. Church outreach isn't intended to make the church look better; it's to demonstrate Jesus to the surrounding area. Church services (get ready for this one) aren't meant to be uplifting to us or to lead us to some higher point of emotion; they are intended to worship Jesus Christ. There can be far more heartfelt love and worship of Jesus in a church with no instruments at all than in a church with an orchestra or band. The purpose of worship isn't to uplift us; it is to … worship.

Worship means honoring the Lord as divine and showing Him respect by engaging in acts of prayer and devotion to Him. This is an upward-directed action. The church in

Ephesus was doing many good deeds, but their hearts, thoughts, and eyes had become misdirected from their first Love. They began to only engage in horizontally directed actions. Let us constantly evaluate ourselves, keeping Christ Jesus at the center of all we do.

Lord Jesus, remind us again today and every day that our service, our devotion, our heart, and our love belong first and always to You. Please keep our hearts from being misdirected into deeds that are cold and without love. Instead, rejuvenate us each day with Your Holy Spirit, filling us with the desire to bring You the worship You are due. Amen.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. Revelation 2:5

The Ephesian church had become a church focused on a social gospel, having left their first love. Jesus now warns them of the consequences of this, saying, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen."

Here, Jesus says "fallen" instead of "stumbled." They had not merely tripped, thus needing correction and redirection. Rather, they had actually fallen from what is proper. They were in a state which could not continue, but absolutely had to be corrected. Without a love for Christ, there would be no sharing the gospel which leads the lost to Christ. Without that, the church would be entirely ineffective.

Because of this, the Lord next says, "repent." The word "repent" simply means to changes one's mind, or to redirect one's purposes. They were to accept the will of God and turn from their self-imposed will. Here, the Greek reads, "and repent," – "Remember and repent." One can remember and not repent – "We used to do that, but this is so much better. These people need to be fed, not to be told they are sinners." Instead, the Lord warns them that the path they have chosen is entirely wrong.

Tending to one's earthy needs without tending to his spiritual needs serves no eternal purpose. It is no good to send a well-fed person through the gates of hell. Therefore, the church is to "do the first works."

When the church was established, they proclaimed the wonder of what Christ did because they understood what it meant to them personally. However, over the years, the memory of the conversion faded, and they began to look for other avenues of service to delight in. These became the primary focus, and the actual purpose of the

church was lost. Jesus' warning is that they should return to these first works. If not, He says, "or else I will come to you quickly."

The verb is present tense, "I am coming." It is as if the move has begun and the only thing that will stop it is an immediate turning to the proper path. Also, some manuscripts leave off the word "quickly." It is the word used in Revelation 1:1, and it can mean "soon," but also "with quickness," "suddenly," or "hastily." If the word belongs in the original, then being combined with "I am coming," it would indicate with suddenness. In this, there is the sense of personal judgment. It is His church, and He is the Judge of it.

When His decision is made, it is He who will act. However, there is the truth that there are many churches that have fallen away and yet which continue to exist. Therefore, Christ's judgment on that church is a spiritual judgment. Just as a church's lampstand cannot be seen, so it will not be known when the decision has been made. But from that time on, the church is no longer considered as a part of the body by the Lord. As He says, He will "remove your lampstand from its place."

The Greek literally reads, "and **move** your lampstand from its place." The movement of the lampstand is one of judgment. The only other time the word is used in Revelation, it is also a movement of judgment –

> "Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place." Revelation 6:14

The purpose of the lampstand is to give light. In a failure to do just that, the Lord removes that which symbolizes the emitting of light. The church becomes a haunt for anything but that light from that point on because it is a place of darkness. The sense here is how the Lord spoke of Israel in the book of Hosea –

> "Call his name Lo-Ammi,
> For you *are* not My people,
> And I will not be your *God.*" Hosea 1:8

The same would be true with the church at Ephesus, as the Lord says once again, "unless you repent." There was no other option open to the church. Repent or perish.

It should be noted that this verse is used incorrectly at times to justify a loss of salvation. "Unless you repent, the Lord will remove your lampstand." This is wholly inappropriate and entirely out of context. The lampstand is the church, not an individual within the

church. As context actually matters, that logic – when used in this way – can be tossed out on its ear.

Life application: For all the commendation of verses 2 and 3, and with what seems to be merely a mild rebuke in verse 4, the thought changes to "Nevertheless… you have left your first love." In this, we suddenly have words of overwhelming importance. Apparently, leaving our "first love" is far weightier than we may imagine. In fact, it is the basis for complete rejection by the Lord.

Tied up in this verse are three specific verbs –

1) *Remember*. Jesus says to go back and look at where the church started in its intent and purpose.

2) *Repent*. The church as a whole must turn back to that original intent and purpose.

3) *Do*. Tied up in the acts of remembering and repenting is the command to "do." The church is to return to a gospel-based, Christ-loving entity.

Jesus asks them to remember their first love, change their mind about their actions now (which aren't directed at all to that first love), and to go back and "do" those things which glorified their first love.

In 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3, Paul says –

> "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. **3** But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

What Paul says is reflected in Jesus' words today. When a woman marries, she does things for her husband that she later forgets about. Here heart turns away from that first love and the excitement she felt for him. Jesus says this type of attitude towards Him is intolerable and if this condition persists, He will take swift and decisive action.

All the good works in the world, without a heart and love for Christ, are simply a waste of time. He wants our love and devotion, not showy deeds. The penalty for this wrong attitude is a dead church that proclaims a social gospel; one which is directed horizontally, not vertically.

Lord, it is apparent that any gospel that fails to glorify You alone is a false one. It is also evident that those who practice showy deeds for others to see, while forgetting to bring You honor, are simply wasting their time. In the end, our church is to be all about You, or we are merely wasting our effort. So, Lord, help our hearts to be directed to You, our First Love, and our actions will be as they should. Amen.

But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
Revelation 2:6

Here we have the second outer layer of the sandwich. Christ complemented the Ephesians in verses 2:2 and 2:3 (a slice of bread). He then rebuked them in verses 2:4 and 2:5 (distasteful inner filling). He now compliments them in this verse (the second slice of bread). In this, He is encouraging first, exhorting through warning next, and then encouraging last. In this second encouragement, he begins with, "But you have this."

This is set in contrast to the words of verse 4. There he said, "you have left your first love." He set that forth as of the most importance, and He even gave a dire warning if it was not heeded. But, to end on a positive note, and to show them that they were not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, he now provides these words.

In other words, "You absolutely must change this behavior here, but in the process, don't take it to an unintended extreme and start allowing this thing over here." And that thing is, "that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans."

There is a great deal of speculation concerning who the Nicolaitans are, and what deeds they were doing. Charles Ellicott notes that "The existence of a sect called Nicolaitans in the second century is attested by Irenæus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria."

The word comes from two words, *nikos*, meaning "to conquer," or "victory," and *laos*, "the people." Vincent's Word Studies notes that there are two main explanations for who these people are. One is a sect which arose from the teachings of Nicolaus who is mentioned in Acts 6:5. It is said that he departed from the truth and became the founder of a heretical sect following Antinomian Gnosticism. Vincent's says –

"They appear to have been characterized by sensuality, seducing Christians to participate in the idolatrous feasts of pagans, and to unchastity. Hence, they are denoted by the names of Balaam and Jezebel, two leading agents of moral contamination under the Old Testament dispensation."

The second view holds that the name is symbolic and replaces the Old Testament figure Balaam (Destroyer of the People) who is found in the book of Numbers. In this, the name Nicolaitans would have the same connotation – Conquering of the People. They followed the same type of practices as Balaam, who sought to overcome God's people, using the same type of temptations as he placed before Israel.

The second interpretation dismisses the seemingly historical and literal nature of the Lord's words. Further, in 2:14 and 2:15, Jesus will refer to these people again, and he will put them in a separate category than that of those who followed the practices of Balaam.

With these things understood, it is possible that – even if the first view is correct – the name Nicolas may refer to a completely different person than the one noted in Acts, or it could be that his name was chosen by a group to simply identify with someone mentioned in Acts, even if he did not actually apostatize from the truth. To malign him without strong evidence is not justified.

It is true that many sects and offshoots of Christianity have been derived from the name of its original proponent. Even today people identify as Wesleyan, Calvinist, and so on. Whatever the nature of the Nicolaitans was, and whatever their "deeds" ultimately were, Jesus notes that they are things "which I also hate."

The church at Ephesus hated the things they did, and Christ also hates them. In correcting their deficiency, Christ did not want them to think they were on the wrong path in regard to the Nicolaitans and suddenly jump onto that heretical highway.

Life application: This particular verse has been debated, manipulated, and distorted at times over the centuries in order to meet the specific agenda of individuals or groups. A good example of this would be the commonly promoted doctrine that this is referring to churches, such as the Catholic Church, that have established hierarchies.

By dividing the word "Nicolaitans" into individual root words – *nikos* and *laos* (mentioned above) – the idea is that these people have taken over the laity of the church and compelled them to submit to the arbitrary dominion of men. Analyses of this type are always set forth as a polemic against individuals or denominations. The problem with this particular analysis is that Revelation was written approximately AD90 and the hierarchies in churches such as Ephesus were those established according to the model set forth by Paul.

Irenaeus, a Church Father, who wrote about a century later, said the Nicolaitans were people who lived lives of unrestrained indulgence. Regardless of the etymology of the name, and there are other attempts to reconcile this name with other promoters of sexual misconduct, the deeds are what the Lord hated.

Sexual sin is particularly destructive. Paul explains why in 1 Corinthians 6:18 –

> "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

Sexual sin can destroy the sinner – whether by disease, destruction, loss of reputation, and so on. Let us, therefore, attempt to live holy lives for the glory of the Lord and abstain from the deeds which He finds so offensive that He states emphatically that He "hates" them.

Heavenly Father, please help us in our personal conduct towards others and to never fall into sins of the flesh. It is our desire to be wholly pleasing to You in all ways and we ask for strength and fortitude as we face trials and temptations in this, or any other manner, which could result in sinning against You. Amen.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." Revelation 2:7

The Lord has spoken forth the words of the first of seven letters to seven churches. He has complimented, noted deficiency, warned, and acknowledged proper doctrine. With the main body of the letter complete, He now provides His final words to the Ephesians, beginning with, "He who has an ear, let him hear." This same phrase will be repeated in all seven letters to the churches.

The first three will be placed before the promises, while the final four will come after the promises. It is a phrase not found in John's gospel, but it is found in both Matthew 11:15 and Mark 4:9.

It is a way of calling to attention something of the highest importance. To "hear" in Scripture means more than just sound entering into the ears. It signifies heeding what is conveyed. Both attention and obedience are to be applied to what is heard. The book of Deuteronomy repeatedly says, "Hear O Israel." In this, Moses is calling Israel to hear and to attend to what is said.

Jesus' words here carry the same weight. "Heed what you have heard, be attentive to it, and be obedient in your attention." But more, Jesus isn't just asking them to respond to what has been said, but what He will now say as He completes His words, next stating, "what the Spirit says."

The meaning of these words is debated. Is it that referred to earlier when John said in verse 1:10, "I was in the Spirit"? Or, is this word of Jesus attributed to the direct influence of the Holy Spirit reminding John of what he heard, as is indicated in John 14?–

> "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. **26** But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."
>
> -John 14:25, 26

Or, is this to be considered the Spirit working through Christ, as is indicated in John 3? –

> "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure." John 3:34

The final option seems most likely, because Jesus directly says, "what the Spirit says." This isn't just a call to remember what was heard in order to write it down. Rather, this is what the Spirit, who is the member of the Godhead who inspires Scripture, was speaking through Christ. There is One God displayed in three members of the Godhead. Each works in accord with the other to reveal His intentions, purposes, and word. In this case, it is what the Spirit says, "to the churches."

This statement could be taken in one of two ways: 1) Everything said to all the churches, or 2) everything said to each church. In other words, the first option is that the Spirit is conveying one message to all the churches combined – every person in every church should heed everything that is said in all seven letters. Or, He is conveying a message to Ephesus, one to Thyatira, one to Sardis, and so on. Each church is to pay heed to what is said to it.

The answer is that all people (He who hears) are to listen to everything that is said to all the churches. There are seven letters to individual churches, but the message to each church is to be heard by all people. The repetition to each church is to call to attention its own issues, but all people in all churches are to know what the status of all churches is. Thus, they can fully know what is pleasing, what is displeasing, and what the promises of overcoming are.

With that understood, Jesus next conveys the good news for the overcomer. He says, "To him who overcomes..." It is a phrase found in all seven letters. Vincent's Word Studies notes that "The verb is used absolutely without any object expressed." In other words, it is a present participle that conveys the thought of "To the *one* overcoming." When one overcomes, he has overcome. It is a finished action.

The question is, "How does one overcome?" The answer is found elsewhere in John's letters. The following insert will explain who it is that "overcomes."

The words of this evaluation are based on 1 John 5:5 (cited below), and which are taken in connection with John's other words of that epistle. Look at how John weaves thoughts together in the book of 1 John in order to ensure that all ends are secure –

> "...whatever is born of God overcomes the world." (5:4)
> "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." (5:1)
> "He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" overcomes the world. (5:5)
> "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." (4:2)
> "...every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. (4:3).

In this, John is obviously equating "Christ" with "Son of God." The Christ is God incarnate (come in the flesh) – where the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Colossians 2:9). John is revealing that which is true and that which is false. This calls out for proper understanding because to believe otherwise is the spirit of the Antichrist.

There are those who claim that Jesus is the Christ, but they do not believe He is God incarnate. Thus, verse 5:1 does not apply to them. There are those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but they do not accept that He is then fully God. Thus, verse 5:5 does not apply to them. In other words, there are sons of God recorded in both testaments – such as in Genesis 6 and Job 1. These are referring to human beings, not the divine Son of God.

There are also sons of God in the New Testament, such as in Romans 8:14 and elsewhere. These are adopted sons of God, not the Son begotten of God – meaning Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God.

One must take the words of John on a much more global scale to fully understand what he is referring to. Without doing so, a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness might appear to

pass the test of one who overcomes the world. But such is not the case. Through evaluating the entire scope of what John is referring to, we find that such heretics do not pass muster, and have not overcome the world. As John asks, "Who is he who overcomes the world...?"

It is the person who will meet the qualifications he will state in a moment, but that person must meet the other qualifications which are directly tied to those words as well. John says that it is "he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." This is the person who overcomes. But he only does so if he believes that the Son of God (Jesus) is the Christ. And further, he only does so if he confesses that Jesus Christ has also come in the flesh.

If he does so, he is of God and has both been born of God and has overcome the world. If he does not confess the deity of Christ (having come in the flesh), he "is not of God." In proper theology, one plus one will always equal two. However, sometimes the equation is built upon other such simple equations. When each is properly realized, the truth of the situation is confirmed. This is why it is so important to have a larger understanding of what John is conveying when talking with people from aberrant cults.

Also, in his words, John uses present participles, each prefixed with an article when speaking of the one who overcomes. More literally, he says, "Who now is the *one* overcoming." The response is, "...the one believing." As noted, one can believe in a "Christ" who is not the Christ (see 2 Corinthians 11:4, for example). It is the one believing in the proper Christ, who is the Son of God – fully Man and yet fully God. In his belief, he is overcoming the world. For those who believe in the wrong "Christ," they are not overcoming anything. They are still in their sins, and they belong to this world.

It is to the person who trusts in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the God/Man, that overcomes. To one in that category, Jesus says, "I will give to eat from the tree of life." The Lord promises that what was lost, at the very beginning when man fell, will be restored to the one who overcomes –

> "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'— **23** therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken." Genesis 3:22, 23

Man disobeyed God, and he was condemned to die. But more, access to the source of eternal life was taken from him. Jesus says that this will now be accessible once again to

the one who overcomes. As he is "overcoming" as noted above, it means that once he qualifies, it is a done deal. It will not be taken from him. It is a note of eternal security, just as promised elsewhere in the epistles. According to Paul in Ephesians 1:13, 14, when one believes, he is given a deposit as a guarantee of this. Jesus now confirms that. What was lost is now restored.

But the eternal life that is granted is not simply in the state and place we now are – as if we must endure an eternity of this planet with its pains and troubles. Rather, Jesus finishes by saying that the tree of life is that "which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

It is the heavenly promise. Not only the life that Adam possessed, but life in a paradisical state just as he possessed it. This will be realized for all who overcome. It is a promise, it is a guarantee, and it is granted the moment that someone receives Jesus Christ – the God/Man – according to the gospel. That final, glorious state will be actualized by God in His timing. But until then, the one who overcomes possesses the surety of the promise by God, who cannot lie.

Life application: To "overcome" is a concept mentioned 11 times in the book of Revelation. One who overcomes is the victorious believer in the Person of Jesus Christ. There is symmetry to the Bible that can't be mistaken – something is lost, something is regained; something goes, something returns. It all fits so incredibly well that it's hard to imagine people not saying, "I'd better check this out a little more."

God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden so that he could worship and serve his Creator for all eternity. God had already supplied everything necessary for the man. All Adam had to do was to direct his attention upward towards God and bask in the glory he beheld. Instead, he exercised his free-will in disobedience to what God had offered. His life would, from that point on, be directed toward the ground – a hard master.

> "Cursed *is* the ground for your sake;
> In toil you shall eat *of* it
> All the days of your life.
> **18** Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
> And you shall eat the herb of the field.
> **19** In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
> Till you return to the ground,
> For out of it you were taken;
> For dust you *are,*
> And to dust you shall return." Genesis 3:17-19

But God did a great and marvelous thing in another garden when His own Son pleaded that the cup of His Father's wrath be taken from Him. However, the Son followed His Father's will and thus prevailed over the devil's work.

The Tree of Life, a representation of Jesus Christ, now stands available to all who will partake. Eternal fellowship, worship and praise, glorying in the Creator – all these are available to those who overcome. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Glory to God in the highest in the name of Jesus! Hallelujah and Amen.

O God! Where Adam disobeyed and lost His right to live in Your presence, Jesus prevailed and regained that right. Now, through faith in Him and His wondrous work, man can again be reconciled to You. Please direct our eyes, our minds, and our thoughts to the wondrous work which was accomplished for the fallen children of men – the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write,
'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:
Revelation 2:8

The second letter to the second church begins with these words, "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write." As a refresher, the word "angel" is certainly to be taken as "messenger" and signifying the leader of the congregation. Also, the word "church" signifies those who have been called out from the world and to the fellowship of His kingdom through the gospel.

This is the second and last time the name Smyrna is found in the Bible. It comes from the noun *smurna* meaning "myrrh." That is derived from the word *muron*, signifying anointing oil, or ointment. Concerning this city, Vincent's Word Studies provides this description –

"Lying a little north of Ephesus, on a gulf of the same name. The original city was destroyed about b.c. 627, and was deserted and in ruins for four hundred years. Alexander the Great contemplated its restoration, and his design was carried out after his death. The new city was built a short distance south of the ancient one, and became the finest in Asia Minor, being known as the glory of Asia. It was one of the cities which claimed the honor of being Homer's birthplace. A splendid temple was erected by the Smyrnaeans to his memory, and a cave in the neighborhood of the city was shown where he was said to have composed his poems. Smyrna's fine harbor made it a commercial center; but it was also distinguished for its schools of rhetoric and philosophy. Polycarp was the first bishop of its church, which suffered much from

persecution, and he was said to have suffered martyrdom in the stadium of the city, a.d. 166."

John is instructed to write to this church a letter from the risen Christ, beginning with, "These things says the First and the Last." This was stated in verse 1:17. It is a title claimed three times by the Lord (Yehovah) of the Old Testament (Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, and 48:12) –

> "Who has performed and done *it,*
> Calling the generations from the beginning?
> 'I, the LORD, am the first;
> And with the last I *am* He.' " Isaiah 41:4

> "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
> And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
> 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last;
> Besides Me *there is* no God." Isaiah 44:6

> "Listen to Me, O Jacob,
> And Israel, My called:
> I *am* He, I *am* the First,
> I *am* also the Last." Isaiah 48:12

Concerning the idea of being "the First," Paul expands on what that means in Colossians 1, explaining how He is the first in several key ways –

> "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. **17** And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. **18** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." Colossians 1:15-18

Christ is the First – not "in time" but "prior to time." He is also the Last. He is the completion of all things. As He transcends time, He is already at any possible ending that ever could be, seeing it completed. This does not mean He has an end, but just as nothing exists before Him, nothing can exist after Him. He is unchanging in His being. This is seen, for example, in Hebrews –

> "...without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually." Hebrews 7:3
>
> "Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever." Hebrews 13:8

And yet, being without change, Jesus next says, "who was dead, and came to life." It speaks of His humanity, literally saying, "who became dead, and lived." It is Jesus Christ who broke the bonds of death itself, having died, but not for His own sin. Because of this, Peter notes in Acts 2 that "it was not possible that He should be held by it."

This is given to those at Smyrna who were set to face testing (as will be noted). The reward for their faith is to be "the crown of life." Because Jesus died and lived again, He promises that to those who are in Him, they too shall live again. There is to be no fear in what man can do. The body may die, but Christ has prevailed! It is the greatest note of comfort and freedom to His people. Again, returning to Hebrews –

> "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebrews 2:14, 15

Praise God! He is alive and we too shall live because of Him. He is Jesus!

Life application: Smyrna's history was one of being sacked, torched, and destroyed. One of the earliest – and certainly the most famous bishop – of Smyrna, Polycarp, was himself set ablaze, burned for his witness of Christ. The last words of Polycarp were recorded as –

"Eighty and six years have I now served Christ, and he has never done me the least wrong: How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior? …Thou threatenest me with Fire which burns for an hour, and so is extinguished; but knowest not the Fire of the Future Judgment of that Eternal Punishment which is reserved for the Ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt!"

Polycarp understood that Christ had died and rose again. In Him is the power of the resurrection, and He has promised it to all who accept His gospel. It is with the same confidence of Polycarp that we should look to our own end – not in fear, but in joyous release from this earthly body of pain and woe. Christ will replace it with something glorious. Praise God for what He has done and what He offers to us!

Lord God, You were there before the universe existed. You are right now – with us and directing all things. And You will be – even unto the ages of ages. You are the First, and You are the Last. All things are from You, and all things belong to You. And yet, You would favor us with intimacy and love because of Jesus Christ our Lord. How can such a marvelous thing be? And yet it is. Thank You for Your love, revealed to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. Revelation 2:9

Like the previous letter to those at Ephesus, immediately after the short description of Himself, Jesus begins his evaluation of the church at Smyrna with, "I know your works." In this case, the beginning of the evaluation is positive, just as it was for the Ephesians. As noted then, the word "works" simply speaks of actions that carry out a desire or purpose. The Lord is fully aware of the works of His people. His having this knowledge should make those at Smyrna conscious of the fact that the Lord is always evaluating them.

Jesus next says, "tribulation." The word is *thlipsis*. It is variously translated as persecution, tribulation, affliction, distress, and so on. It signifies pressure. It is as if one is in a narrow place, hemmed in and feeling confined, and thus without options. One might say, "There is no way to escape." In this case, it is probably referring to persecution, oppression, and so on. Whatever they were facing, the Lord was fully aware of it.

After this, the Lord adds in, "and poverty." Not only did they have tribulations, but they were poor to begin with. As this condition is unique to the seven letters, it is probably that they were exceedingly poor. It was an obvious characteristic that anyone would agree with. However, the Lord adds in a note to tell them that such poverty was actually only an external perception that hid a greater truth. He says, "but you are rich."

Despite being in poverty, the church at Smyrna held the greatest treasure of all – salvation through the blood of Christ. It is what Paul refers to in his second letter to the Corinthians –

> "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."
> -2 Corinthians 8:9

James also speaks of this in his epistle –

> "Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" James 2:5

Jesus' words are a word of encouragement that what their earthy existence consists of is nothing in comparison to the spiritual treasure they actually possess. With that understood, He then turns to an obvious condition that existed in their area and which certainly caused confusion among the brethren. He says, "and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews."

The Jewish problem, meaning Jews pitting their Jewishness against Gentiles, is one that infected churches then, and it is one that infects churches today. This doesn't signify anything wrong with being Jewish, but in being Jewish in relation to the law and in relation to Christ Jesus who is the fulfillment of the law.

Paul's letter to the Galatians addresses this issue in great detail. Jews had come into the church at Galatia and had marred the purity of the gospel. Instead of accepting salvation by grace through faith, they insisted that the believers had to observe the law. This is addressed by Paul in other epistles as well, and it is referred to in some detail in Acts.

Further, it appears by the use of the word "blasphemy" that Jesus is referring not just to Judaizers of the faith, but to Jews who rejected the faith. They would blasphemously revile the name of Christ Jesus, having rejected Him as their Messiah. But Paul explains what that then means –

> "For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that
> which *is* outward in the flesh; **29** but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly;
> and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose
> praise *is* not from men but from God." Romans 2:28, 29

Paul's words form a pun based on the word "Jew." That word comes from the tribe of Judah. The word "Judah" means "praise." Thus, Paul is saying that being a true Jew does not come from culture, lineage, or the rite of circumcision. It comes from a right heart attitude towards God. These Jews had rejected God's Messiah, and thus they were not true Jews. Instead, Jesus says they "are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan."

In the Greek, the word synagogue is used only one time when speaking of a congregation of believers in the Messiah. That is found in James 2:2. James' epistle is

specifically addressed to Jewish believers. Here in Revelation, Jesus uses the term *ekklésia*, or a called-out assembly, when referring to the churches. Jesus is clearly identifying non-believing Jewish synagogues with Satan. This was true then, and it is true today.

This does not mean that they actively worship Satan, but that in having rejected Christ, the incarnate Lord (Yehovah), the Lord is not among them. Without Christ, they then – by default – belong to the devil. That is explicitly stated by Jesus in John 8:44 –

> "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources,* for he is a liar and the father of it."

Unfortunately, Jesus' words in this verse have been misapplied to false Christians, heretical denominations, etc. However, it isn't referring to any of those. Instead, it is referring to Christ-rejecting Jews. A Jew is a Jew and a Gentile is a Gentile. Gentiles do not become Jews when they accept Christ. The words of the Lord are directed solely to Jewish non-believers.

Life application: Like faithful Christians throughout the ages, the church at Smyrna remained steadfast in their loyalty and devotion to Jesus Christ, despite their poverty. It is a sad state of affairs when Christians expect blessings and miracles, riches and ease because of their faith in Christ. Such is a false gospel that provides false earthly hope. The Bible never promises these things. Those in Smyrna understood this.

Being rich or poor is no indication of divine favor. The Bible makes this abundantly clear. The "prosperity gospel" is not simply bad doctrine; it is heresy. The gospel is laid out by the Lord and cannot be amended. It is to be proclaimed without any additional promises of material blessing. This is one of the devil's greatest tools against true faith and a Christ-honoring church. True believers have treasure stored up in heaven where moth and rust can never destroy.

All people are either in Christ or they are of the devil. Accepting a false gospel, or simply rejecting the true gospel, means that individual remains in Adam and of the devil. This is true for both Jew and Gentile. Be sure to get Jesus right – to the glory of God the Father.

Lord Jesus, thank You for faithful believers in churches around the world – some of whom have nothing but poverty and trouble, but who remain steadfast in their love of You. Even if earthly riches are lacking, those who are Yours are the richest people of all. They

have a heavenly hope and the surety of eternal life in Your glorious presence. No matter what our earthly state is, how great it is to be called Your servant! Amen.

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
Revelation 2:10

Jesus just told the church at Smyrna that He was aware of their difficult state. Now, He lets them know that their immediate prospects will seem to be even worse than what they are already facing. But this should not be unexpected.

Jesus let His early followers know that they should expect tribulation (John 16:33). Paul, on several occasions, reminded believers that this was to continue to be expected (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 3:4). The same is true in the other apostolic writings as well (e.g. 1 Peter 4:12 and so on). Now, Jesus directly tells the church that difficulties are just ahead, saying, "Do not fear."

The words, "Do not fear," when spoken by the Lord literally permeate Scripture. When the Lord says this, it is to be considered the highest form of surety that despite what lies ahead, He is already aware of it and will be with his people through it. For example, when Jacob was set to leave the land of Canaan for the last time, the Lord was with him-

> "So He said, 'I *am* God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. **4** I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up *again;* and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.'"
> -Genesis 46:3, 4

Again and again, the Lord speaks these same words to His people at points in time when fear would be the normal and expected reaction. For those at Smyrna, what was coming would be more than one trial, but a set of them, as He says, "any of those things which you are about to suffer."

This group, who had already faced struggle, was set to have more tribulations heaped upon them, even to the point of suffering. With this unfortunate news stated, the Lord then expands on the thought, saying, "Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison." What appears to be the case, because He just mentioned the "synagogue of Satan," is that the non-believing Jews of the area would be the motivating factor in what was about to occur.

The devil (v.10) and Satan (v.9) are the same being, and therefore it is possible – without being dogmatic – that they would devise some sort of scheme, causing those in the church to be arrested and cast into prison. It is a logical assumption.

The book of Acts carefully records the early establishment of the church. One of the points that is clearly evident is that Christianity was identified as a subsect of Judaism. Under the Roman Empire, Judaism was considered *religio licita*, or an accepted form of worship. When Christianity sprouted out of that, the Jews – time and again – tried to distance themselves from it. However, again and again, the legal decision came back allowing Christianity under the greater umbrella of the Jewish faith.

Because of this, it was allowed to spread and blossom. It is apparent that at times the Jews would run in and out of favor with the government. As this occurred, it affected believers as well. Here in the letter to Smyrna, it appears that the non-believing Jews will be able to exert enough influence that these believers would be apprehended and imprisoned. Jesus then says the reason for it. It is so "that you may be tested."

This is something that the Lord has allowed many times in His church. Such testing is not for the Lord's knowledge. He knows who are His. It is also not a test of individual salvation – something decided when one comes to Christ in faith. Rather, the testing served at least two major purposes. The first was strengthening of personal faith that already existed, and the second is to refine the church as a body.

Peter speaks of these things in his first epistle –

> "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, **7** that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, **8** whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him,* yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, **9** receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls." 1 Peter 1:6-9

The author of Hebrews refers to such things in Hebrews 10:32-36. With the knowledge that these things were surely coming upon them, the Lord next says, "and you will have tribulation ten days." The term "ten days" or "ten times" is not necessarily to be taken literally. It is an idiom found throughout Scripture to indicate a period of testing. In Genesis 31, Numbers 14, Nehemiah 4, and Job 19, the people explain their testing in this way, saying, "ten times." Other similar uses of the number ten being used this way are

also noted. For example, in Daniel 1 (which uses the same terminology as this verse in Revelation) they were tested for "ten days" –

> "So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, **12** 'Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. **13** Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, *so* deal with your servants.' **14** So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.
> **15** And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. **16** Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables." -Daniel 1:11-16

Jesus now uses this same terminology and applies it in the context of the suffering of those in Smyrna. In this testing of "ten days," He exhorts them, saying, "Be faithful until death." The One who Himself was faithful unto death makes a call to His people to act in the same manner. He is not asking them to do anything He had not already experienced. And just as He prevailed over death, so He holds the keys to allow the same for His faithful.

As He says, "and I will give you the crown of life." It is a note of honor. James mentions the "crown of life" as well –

> "Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." James 1:12

Other crowns are also noted for believers in the New Testament, such as the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8) and the crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4). Such things are stated to give hope to believers as we anticipate the life that is truly life. What happens here, though maybe terrifying or tragic, is only a temporary trial. The Lord allows these things to strengthen us, refine His church, and to provide encouragement to others who are set to face such things as well.

<u>Life application:</u> As noted, throughout the Bible, the Lord admonishes His people to not fear. In 1 John 4, we are told, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."

Believers truly have no need to fear. Christ has prevailed over the greatest enemy of all, death and Hades. Thus, He alone has the power to save from death, and He has the power to cast into hell. As He says in Matthew 19, "… do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

For those in Christ, there is to be no fear of death, and there is to be no fear of hell. Death cannot hold us, and hell has no right to us. Jesus has prevailed over death and He promises the gift of eternal life to His faithful followers. Be encouraged in this. We serve a great and glorious God. He is Jesus.

How great it is, Lord, to know that nothing in the entire universe can separate us from You. You prevailed over death, and through faith in Your mighty accomplishments, we now have the promise of eternal security and eternal life. No fear here… we are servants of the Most High God! Amen.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." Revelation 2:11

Jesus repeats the words previously spoken to the church at Ephesus, saying, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." To understand the significance of this statement, refer to the comments of verse 2:7. In short, it is a call out to the churches to pay heed to His words.

He then next says, "He who overcomes." Again, as before, to "overcome" is something that occurs when one believes in the finished work of Christ, meaning the God/Man. There is no other way to overcome than through what He has done. For those who do overcome, Jesus says, that he "shall not be hurt by the second death."

This is a phrase that is new to Scripture. It can't be fully understood without referring to its explanatory verses found later in Revelation –

> "Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Revelation 20:6
>
> "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. **15** And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Revelation 20:14, 15

> "And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. **7** He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. **8** But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.'" Revelation 21:6-8

The "second death" is the Lake of Fire. It is the final state for all humanity apart from God. Jesus is the only way to avoid this fate. To believe in Him is to overcome. To overcome means that they have been spared from this second death. They have moved from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is the reconnection to God that was lost at the very beginning when Adam sinned. Through faith in Christ, one is born again. The reconnection is made, and its effects are eternal.

Life application: One must overcome in this life and "he who has an ear" should pay close attention to the warning. This is our one big chance to get it right. The book of Hebrews makes this perfectly clear in verse 9:27 – "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, …" Jesus, through the eternal Spirit, calls out to the churches and warns us of the consequences of not calling on Jesus as Lord.

When speaking to the people of Israel in a discourse about the judgment of the nations, Jesus says that the Lake of Fire was designed for the devil and his angels –

> "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Matthew 25:41

The purpose for man was eternal life in the presence of God. However, God granted man free will. Adam used it and the spiritual connection to God was severed. In order to have that repaired, we are expected to use our free will wisely. Those who want to live apart from God now will live apart from God for all eternity. The Lake of Fire is eternal. It is man's default position. When God judges, no one will be able to complain that the judgment was unfair.

Now, while there is breath in your lungs, is the time to call on the name of Jesus and get right with God. The switch from the default position is only possible through Him. Anything else will result in the eternal sadness of the "second death."

Lord God, thank You for Jesus and His cross. We know that without it there would be no hope at all. But because He prevailed over death, we too can prevail over it. For those who receive Him, there is the promise of eternal life. May we be careful to spend our

time getting this word of reconciliation out to those who so desperately need to hear it. All glory to Jesus who makes these things possible! Amen.

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write,
'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:'" Revelation 2:12

The words of the Lord are next directed "to the angel of the church in Pergamos." The name Pergamos is properly, Pergamum. It is derived from the Greek word *purgos*, meaning a tower or fortified structure, such as a castle. Charles Ellicott gives a brief description of the location –

"Unlike Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamos was not distinguished as a commercial city. Its importance was due to other causes. A striking cone shaped hill rose from the plain which bordered the northern banks of the Caicus. The hill was considered sacred. Its value as a strong natural fortress was early recognised, and it was used as a keep and treasury where local chieftains deposited their wealth. Its greatness as a city dated from Eumenes II., who was given by the Romans a large surrounding territory, and who fixed Pergamos as his royal residence. Under his auspices a splendid city—rich in public buildings, temples, art galleries, and with a library which rivalled that of Alexandria—rose into being. It has been described as a city of temples, 'a sort of union of a pagan cathedral city, an university town, and a royal residence.' It retained its splendour even after it passed by bequest to the Roman Republic, and was declared by Pliny to be a city unrivalled in the province of Asia."

For a longer and more detailed description, Vincent's Word Studies can be referred to. The address to the angel of Pergamos begins with "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword." The meaning of this was explained in the commentary on Revelation 1:16, which can be referred to.

<u>Life application:</u> As recorded by an ancient witness, Pergamos was "given to idolatry more than all Asia." There were temples, including the one dedicated to Zeus who was called *Soter Theos*, or the Savior God. When Caesar worship became acceptable, it was the first city in the area to build a temple dedicated to Augustus. Pergamos was also famous for its medical schools. The god of health, Asclepius (symbolized by a serpent), was noted there as well. It is into this setting that the church is addressed.

The two-edged sword, as noted in Revelation 1:16, is representative of an instrument that is effective in cutting in both directions. It is also effective in deep thrusts. As noted in the commentary on 1:16, the Old Testament Hebrew uses a term similar to the Greek, "the mouth of the sword," for its edge. The New Testament describes the sword as both

the Spirit of God and as the word of God (the Bible). Jesus is getting ready to explain the symbolism that goes along with the sword and how it pertains to the church – both internally in the church (cutting in one direction) and externally (cutting in the opposite direction) in the surrounding area "where Satan's throne is" (Revelation 2:13).

God is an impartial judge. When the church errs, it receives judgment too. We can't openly flaunt sin in the church and expect to get away with it. The Bible notes, in both testaments, that judgment begins at the house of the Lord. Only after wickedness and disobedience are taken care of in God's house does He turn to remove it elsewhere. Let us remember this lesson as we conduct our lives in His presence!

Righteous and holy is the Lord God Almighty. Just and true are His judgments. May we, the sheep of Your fold, be obedient to Your word and both walk and act in line with what You determine for each of us. Help us to live our lives as honest and faithful Christians – to Your glory. Amen.

"I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. Revelation 2:13

The Lord now begins to specifically addresses the church concerning their actions. As before, He says, "I know your works." The Lord is aware of all that a church does – both good and evil. Next, He adds in the thought, "and where you dwell." The implication, without going any further, is that the location itself is a part of either something positive or negative. Otherwise, there would be no reason to state this. In explanation of the words, the Lord next says, "where Satan's throne is."

The idea is that Satan has authority and rule in Pergamos. It explains why Jesus said, "and where you dwell." There are certainly many temptations, there was much wickedness, and many trials because these things would have been faced by those of the church. Additionally, as was noted in the previous verse, it was a city of many temples to pagan deities. This would have certainly caused friction between the Christians and those who worshiped false gods.

If they were to venture into the city and proclaim the gospel, those who heard could easily become enraged over the thought that their gods were no gods at all. This is what happened in Acts 19 concerning the temple to Diana, goddess of the Ephesians. The people became so enraged at the message Paul proclaimed that a riot ensued.

Despite facing such troubles at Pergamos, in the place where Satan's throne was said to be, the Lord commends the church, saying, "And you hold fast to My name." The words are reminiscent of the words of Peter in his first epistle –

> "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you,* for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. **15** But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. **16** Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." 1 Peter 4:14-16

Despite whatever trials they faced at Pergamos, the throne of Satan, the believers were not willing to hide the fact that they were followers of Christ. They clung to their identity as such and were unwilling to back down, obviously despite great challenges or persecution. Otherwise, there would be no reason to note this. As a confirmation of that, He then says, "and did not deny My faith."

It is the mark of the Christian. Believers do not have a "god" in front of them made of wood or stone. Rather, believers have faith in what they do not see. The Lord ascended after the completion of His earthly ministry, and all we have is the story of His coming contained in the Scriptures which tell of Him. Thus, faith is the essential point of Christian life. The believers at Pergamos were unwilling to deny their faith in what they believed, "even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr."

Nothing is known of Antipas outside of Scripture with the exception of some obviously made up fables. One translation of the name is, "Instead of All." Therefore, the name could be a designation of someone who was willing to die in order to save others in the congregation. This is wholly speculation, however. Either way, he is called "My faithful martyr."

Some translations say, "My faithful witness." The reason is that the Greek word *martus* signifies someone who is a witness, and this is how the word is usually translated. However, in saying "martyr," it conveys the thought that he was not only faithful in his witness, but he gave his life for it in the process. As Jesus next says, "who was killed among you."

This is where we derive our modern term of martyr. It is an acknowledgment that a person not only bore witness to the faith, but that they did so to the point of death. One can speculate that in some uprising that occurred, this individual was willing to lay down his life rather than to deny his faith in the Lord Jesus. It is a note of high honor for his

faithful stand. And to highlight it even further, the Lord again says, “where Satan dwells.”

By saying this a second time, it highlights and accentuates the thought. It is similar to verse 5 where Jesus says to repent, and then at the end of the verse He again says, “unless you repent.” Despite all of the wickedness that Satan could throw at the believers in Pergamos, Antipas was willing to stand boldly in the face of it and offer his life rather than to deny the faith.

Life application: Antipas was so grounded in the faith that he willingly held fast, even to the point of death. If, in fact, he did this to save others, it is then reminiscent of the words of John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” Whatever the truth is about Antipas’ martyrdom, the people of Pergamos held fast to the words and truth of Jesus and did not deny him, even in the face of what occurred.

Around the world today, Christians are being martyred in huge numbers. These faithful believers will be remembered by Jesus and rewarded on the Great Day of Judgment that lies ahead. Satan roams about, seeking to destroy all he can, and his attacks on the faithful continue.

Even in lands that were once bastions of promoting the gospel, persecution has begun to take root. But more, even within churches this is becoming true. Those who hold to the true gospel are facing persecution from others who promote false gospels.

This trend will only increase as the world turns against what Scripture proclaims. But fear not, Jesus will right all wrongs. It is He who holds the keys to death and Hades.

Lord Jesus, surely we are weak, but through faith in You we can be strong. This is true even in the midst of persecution and trial. Today we say a special prayer for those Christians who are facing death at the hand of Your enemies. May they be strengthened by Your comforting Holy Spirit. We know that You are not inattentive to their state, so please give them strength in their trials. Amen.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.
Revelation 2:14

Jesus, the One who “has the two-edged sword” (verse 12), began his words to the church at Pergamos with a note of approval concerning their conduct. That was because of their previously having held fast to His name and not denying His faith. He now will speak to them of their failings. He begins with, “But I have a few things against you.”

In this, He is showing that past deeds cannot cover over present failings. This is an important point because it is reflective of many churches throughout the ages. “This church is 147 years old and was started by the great pastor Ermine Evangelist.” Or, “This church was the first church to send missionaries to the Amfalula Islands in the South Pacific.” Such things are irrelevant if the present church has moral failings.

In the case of Pergamos, the Lord continues with, “because you have there those who hold to the doctrine of Balaam.” Balaam is a figure first found in Numbers 22. Being a diviner, he was summoned from his home located near the Euphrates River to come to the land east of Canaan in order to curse Israel.

In the story, he first refuses but eventually comes. When he arrived, he was unable to curse them, but instead blessed them several times. After this, it appeared his presence in the biblical narrative had ended, but it was not so. He reappears in Numbers 31 and is found to have been behind a scheme to seduce Israel, weakening their morals and causing a disruption in the allegiance of many toward the Lord God.

This is where Jesus picks up the narrative concerning Balaam, saying that he “taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel.” The word translated as “stumbling block” is *skandalon*. One can see the modern word “scandal” in it. It can signify a snare, an occasion to fall, an offense, and so on. The idea of a stumbling block is something that causes a person to trip.

In the winter, frost heaves up rocks in the fields. They may push up just an inch or two, and the grass makes them unnoticeable. But, a person walking in the field will catch his toe on it and tumble over. It is something that seems insignificant, but which can cause great offense (a scandal).

However, a person (or a group of people) who stumble are in a different category than those who fall. To stumble signifies needing correction. To fall will often mean one is beyond remedy. The situation in Pergamos is that of stumbling, but it is not too late for them to correct their deficiency. And so, Christ defines what they are doing which is similar to what Balaam did. It is “to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.”

The instruction for avoiding or eating things sacrificed to idols is a subject which is too long to fully explain here, but it is first set forth in Acts 15, at the Council in Jerusalem –

> "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: **29** that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well." Acts 15:28, 29

The "things offered to idols" is speaking of consuming such things. This was an intermediate step concerning these things during the early establishment of the church. Paul's letters will qualify this order, explaining the matter is to be based on a person's conscience. He discusses the matter of foods in great detail in Romans 14. He then specifically refers to things sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 8, and again in 1 Corinthians 10.

To get a fuller understanding of what is and what is not allowed, and what the importance of those things are in relation to others – both within and without the church – one can refer to the Superior Word commentary on those passages.

The second issue, that of "sexual immorality," is prohibited throughout Scripture. Sex is intended to be between a man and woman within the bonds of marriage. If that limitation is maintained, nothing unfavorable will result in regard to impurity or judgment. As Hebrews says –

> "Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Hebrews 13:4

To go beyond that is to be considered inappropriate. So firm is the Lord in this regard that sexual immorality is noted even on the very last page of Scripture –

> "Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. **15** But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." Revelation 22:14, 15

<u>Life application:</u> In Numbers 25, the harlotry of Israel is recorded. At that time, it says that twenty-four thousand died in the plague sent by the Lord. After that, in Numbers 31, vengeance was taken upon the Midianites, and Israel destroyed them along with Balaam who was the instigator of what happened. As it says –

> "And they warred against the Midianites, just as the LORD commanded Moses, and they killed all the males. **8** They killed the kings of Midian with *the rest of* those who were killed—Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword." Numbers 31:7, 8

The question is, could Pergamos expect any less if they failed to handle the situation? No! And this is certainly the reason why the particular symbolism of Jesus was presented to the congregation – "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword" (2:12).

In other words, the sword was the chosen description of Christ for this church indicating that the same judgment of Balaam was destined for those who failed to repent of their misdeeds. Jesus is not the "cosmic pushover" that He is often portrayed as being. He is the Lord God Almighty and will punish disbelievers and those who arrogantly put His grace to the test. He is holy, He is just, and He is righteous. He is Jesus.

Lord Jesus, you know each one of us intimately and you know the secret faults of our hearts and our deeds. Turn our hearts to You and away from that which is dishonorable and wicked. Especially Lord, please help us with our personal struggles, be they drug, alcohol, gambling, sexual, or other addictions. Through You we can gain victory. Amen.

Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Revelation 2:15

In the previous verse, Jesus said, "I have a few things against you." He then went on to speak of the doctrine of Balaam which included a couple of negative things. He now finishes the list with, "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans." The words are emphatic. A literal translation would be, "So have also you..."

It is debated what the intent of the emphasis is. It may be saying, "Just as you have those who hold to the doctrine of Balaam, so you also have those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans." If this is the intent, then there is still another division which must be determined. Is the doctrine of Balaam the same type of doctrine as the Nicolaitans, or is it in a separate category? If it is the same, then what they taught is known. If it is different, then we can't be sure what the Nicolaitans actually taught.

There are also two other options concerning the emphasis. It could be in relation to Israel. "Just as Israel was seduced by Balaam, so are you seduced by this Nicolaitan doctrine. This seems less likely because Jesus seems to be saying that they have those

who hold to the doctrine of Balaam, and they also have those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

The final option is that this is referring to the Ephesian church (verse 2:6). In this, the emphasis is on the fact that not only did they have one major doctrinal error (that of Balaam), but they also have a second one (that of the Nicolaitans). It is a doctrine said to be hated by the church in Ephesus, but this church of Pergamos has accepted it. This last option is not to be quickly discounted, because Jesus next repeats what He said to the Ephesian church, stating, "which thing I hate."

With these final words, there is a slight variation in source texts. Instead of "which thing I hate," some texts say, "in like manner." With this change, the various options above take on a stronger or less likely case as to which is correct, and it is difficult to be dogmatic concerning the actual intent of this particular verse.

No matter which variation is correct, the Lord is displeased with the conduct of those who hold to these aberrant doctrines. It is a stern note of warning that they must turn away from the path they are on.

Life application: Whatever the actual doctrine of the Nicolaitans was, what appears certain is that it took a stand against holiness. In coming to Christ, and by no longer being under the law, people then assume that they are free to exercise whatever moral perversion makes them happy. But this is untrue. In Christ, believers are made holy in order to conduct their lives in holiness. This is why Paul, writing to saved believers at Galatia, says the following –

> "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the
> flesh. **17** For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and
> these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you
> wish. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.
> **19** Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication,
> uncleanness, lewdness, **20** idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies,
> outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, **21** envy, murders,
> drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also
> told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the
> kingdom of God." Galatians 5:16-21

The issue is not whether those who are saved will lose their salvation. Paul's words indicate that those who are not saved, when presented with a false gospel, will never be

saved. Christ died for sin. If people are told that their lives are not sinful, then they will never be cleansed of their sin.

Lord God, we have been separated from you because of sin. The good news of Jesus' coming tells us that He dealt with our sin for us. Help us to be wise and call out to Him while we have the chance. And then after that, may You be pleased with how we conduct our lives, living in holiness and to Your glory alone. Amen.

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. Revelation 2:16

Due to the tolerance of those who hold to Balaam's doctrine, and to those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans – something Jesus says he hates – He now warns them, "Repent."

The word "repent" signifies a changing of the mind. In the Bible, it is especially so in reference to accepting the will of God. One could say, "to think differently afterwards." The people are doing one thing, Jesus warns them to not do that thing, and to think differently and no longer do what they had been doing. In this case, it is to no longer tolerate what Jesus finds displeasing. Should they fail to do so, He continues by saying, "or else I will come to you quickly."

The word translated as "quickly" means "without delay," "soon," or "suddenly." The Lord will not hesitate to take action at the most propitious moment, and when He does, it will be a decisive one. The warning has been given. If they fail to heed, He says He "will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

The word "repent" (above) is in the singular. He is talking to the leader of the church (the angel of verse 2:12 who represents the whole). He now says "them." The leader is responsible for the actions of those in the church. He can expel them, correct them, etc. If he fails to do so, judgment will come.

Here we see the effective use of the sword mentioned in verse 12. There it said, "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword." The sword is the means of judgment for this church, just as it was for Balaam. Before Balaam committed his wickedness against Israel, the Lord withstood him with a drawn sword (see Numbers 22:23).

Eventually, Balaam brought Israel to conduct wickedness before the Lord (as Jesus noted in verse 2:14), and he was slain with the sword (Numbers 31:8 and Joshua 13:22).

Jesus promises no less to those who fail to repent. The reason this is so is because they bear His name. In their vile actions, it is perceived that He is tolerant of such things. Judgment must come upon them because of this. What occurred with Israel is promised to also come about in His church.

Obviously, the sword here is being used metaphorically for some type of judgment. It could be some type of disease for those who practice the sins, it could be some type of persecution, or maybe it could even be some type of natural calamity. When it came, the people would be prompted to say, "We were warned." His hand of judgment would be understood for what it was.

Life application: Jesus has just openly presented the sins of those in Pergamos and now He instructs them to "repent." Our own deeds are what testify against us. The question has been asked many times in history, "Why does God send us to hell unless we do what He demands?" This question holds to the fundamental error of misunderstanding the nature of God and the nature of hell.

As previously noted, hell was a place prepared for "the devil and his angels," not for man. Therefore, it is we who choose the path to hell. Instead of God saying, "If you don't do what I say, I will send you to hell," the Bible teaches that, "If you do what I say, I will keep you from hell." Freewill is what makes the difference possible. Therefore, how we exercise our freewill is of eternal importance.

If we fail to wisely respond to His counsel, He will fight against us with the sword of His mouth. Remember from chapter 1 the lesson of the sword. The sword is noted as the power of the Spirit of God, and as the word of God, the Bible. Because this is so, the sword coming from Jesus' mouth is authoritative, all-powerful, and able to consume anything which comes against it.

Peter speaks of this in his first epistle –

> "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God." 1 Peter 4:17

This judgment, which begins at the house of God, will remove all who fail to make the right choice concerning their relationship with Christ. Again, this is *our* choice. Assigning blame to God for the consequences of our own actions is like a child blaming a parent when he steals a cookie after being told not to. It is incorrect thinking on our part.

Lord, help us in our confusion concerning the things that we don't understand. Help us to make right decisions based on Your nature and Your character, and not from our limited

perspective. You are the Creator, and we know that Your will, not ours, is what is right and good. Lead us in paths of right thought and right understanding. Amen.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*."' Revelation 2:17

Now, for the third time, Jesus repeats the words previously spoken to both Ephesus and Smyrna, saying, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Refer to the comments of verse 2:7, if necessary. In short, it is a call out to the churches to pay heed to His words.

Next, He says, "To him who overcomes." Again, it is the same idea as previously mentioned to both churches. A person "overcomes" when he believes in the finished work of Christ, meaning the God/Man. There is no other way to overcome than through what He has done.

For the one who overcomes, the Lord says, "I will give some of the hidden manna to eat." It is debated what the meaning of the "hidden manna" is. However, to understand the original context of it, one can refer to this sermon from the Superior Word study on the book of Exodus. At the end of the sermon, the hidden manna is first explained – see Exodus 16:22-36 (Entering God's Rest-The Hidden Omer) click YouTube or Sermon Audio to watch (fwd to near the end of sermon).

Ultimately, the manna was given in Old Testament typology to picture Christ who sustains His people. He explicitly equates Himself to the manna in the wilderness in John 6:30-34 and 6:47-51. For example –

> "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. **48** I am the bread of life. **49** Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. **50** This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. **51** I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." John 6:47-51

In Colossians 3, those who have come to Christ are said to be hidden with Christ in God–

> "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. **2** Set your mind on things above, not on

things on the earth. [3] For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." Colossians 3:1-4

At this time, what is true about our relationship with God through Christ is hidden, but what is hidden will be revealed. God's people will be glorified, and we shall partake of Christ's sustaining influence for all eternity at that time.

Along with the hidden manna, Jesus also says, "And I will give him a white stone." There are many opinions concerning what this is referring to, and countless ideas have been brought forth to explain exactly what is being conveyed.

One possibility is that in the culture of the time, and even in certain instances today, when a vote was cast, a white stone meant "not guilty." Jesus handing us a white stone may mean that we are not guilty before God and we will never be judged for condemnation. This wonderful release from sin comes from Jesus' shed blood. By trusting in Him, He has become our substitute. He bore the wrath that we deserve. However, this particular idea is not actually found in Scripture.

However, what may be referred to here is a reference found in Deuteronomy 27, where an altar was instructed to be set up and covered in lime (whitewash). On it, all the words of the law were to be inscribed. After that, the people of Israel were to stand on two separate mountains, and the curses for disobeying the law were to be called out while the people confirmed those things with the word "Amen."

The last curse to be pronounced was, "Cursed *is* the one who does not confirm *all* the words of this law by observing them." With that, the people were to confirm it with, "Amen." Paul refers to that in Galatians 3:10, saying, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.'"

The idea of this is that the "law brings a curse" because, as Paul says, "the just shall live by faith." The one who overcomes, then, is given his own white stone – symbolized by this Old Testament altar of white stone – which declares the person "not guilty" because he has been imputed Christ's perfect obedience to this law. Christ bore our guilt (2 Corinthians 5:21 and Galatians 3:13) in our stead.

Jesus continues, saying, "and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*." The giving of a name indicates several things. The one who gives the name has authority over that person – to accept or reject. For example, the

Lord renamed Abraham and Sarah. He renamed Jacob, and so on. In renaming them, He was giving them a new identification which was bestowed by Him, showing that He had accepted them.

Further, in giving a name, it signifies the new nature of that person. In the renaming of Jacob to Israel, the new nature is explicitly stated –

> "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Genesis 32:28

The Lord is saying that those who receive the white stone are His, and they have been given a new nature – one in which the law is fulfilled, adoption is granted, and full inheritance as sons is realized.

Paul explains that the moment we trust in Jesus, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit which guarantees this will take place –

> "In Him you also *trusted,* after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 1:13, 14

The stone is a physical token of this spiritual truth.

<u>Life application:</u> Christ has done the work – all of it – in order to redeem fallen man. All God asks of us is to accept what He has done, receive it, and be reconciled to Him. This is how one overcomes. In overcoming, all of the blessings promised by God are granted to His adopted children. Be sure to not miss the simplicity of what God offers. Just reach out, by faith, and receive it.

But, remember that there are warnings and admonitions in these seven letters as well. We cannot please God by disobeying what He has forbidden, or by doing those things that He hates. Let us put aside our misdeeds, come to God through Christ, and live holy lives to Him for all of our days.

It is beyond comprehension, O Lord, that You would do all the work to save us. All we have to do is, by faith, accept Christ's deeds of righteousness in fulfilling the law on our behalf. How great is Your love that You have done this! Thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit, given to us when we believe, and which is the guarantee of the good things to come for all eternity. Amen.

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,
‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: Revelation 2:18

The words of Christ Jesus are now directed to the fourth of the seven churches. It is “to the angel of the church in Thyatira.” The name Thyatira is of uncertain origin. Charles Ellicott provides us with a description of the location –

“Thyatira was situated between Pergamos and Sardis, a little off the main road which connected these two cities. It was a Macedonian colony, founded by Alexander the Great after the overthrow of the Persian empire. The Macedonian colonists appear to have introduced the worship of Apollo, honoured as the Sun-god, under the name of Tyrimnas. It has been thought by some that the description here given of Christ—'the eyes of flame’—was selected in allusion to this worship of the Sun-god, under the form of some dazzlingly ornamented image. Certainly close commercial intercourse connected the daughter colony with its mother city. There seem to have been various mercantile guilds in the colony—bakers, potters, tanners, weavers, and dyers. The dye-trade was, perhaps, the most important. Lydia, the seller of purple, was in all likelihood connected with the guild of dyers; and her appearance in Philippi is an illustration of the trade relations of Macedonia and Thyatira. To her the Christian community at Thyatira may have owed its beginning. ‘She who had gone forth for a while, to buy and sell, and get gain, when she returned home may have brought home with her richer merchandise than any she had looked to obtain’ (Trench). The population was of a mixed character, and included, besides Asiatics, Macedonians, Italians, and Chaldeans.”

It is to the angel (meaning the leader) of this church that the Lord instructs John to write, saying, “These things says the Son of God.” Here, the Lord personally identifies Himself as the Son of God rather than the Son of Man (verse 1:13 & again in 14:14). Further, this is the only time He is referred to in this way in the entire book. Like the term “the First and the Last” (1:8) and “He who has the sharp two-edged sword,” (2:12), it is a clear reference to deity.

Just as Christ is the Son of Man – meaning He was born into the stream of humanity, so He is the Son of God – meaning He is begotten of the Father. It is this God/Man “who has eyes like a flame of fire.” This is the symbolism introduced in verse 1:14, and which was explained there as indicating judgment, purification, refinement, and so on.

His gaze can pierce through all things to determine what is hidden and secret as easily as that which is open and evident. In His burning eyes issues forth purification in judgment (as noted in 1:14) such as in the judgment of believers at the Bema seat judgment. In

this case, Christ's eyes are evaluating the entire church at Thyatira. But along with His eyes, it says, "and His feet like fine brass."

This was noted in Revelation 1:15 and its significance was detailed there. The Greek word used to describe His feet is used now for the second and last time in Scripture – *chalkolibanon*. As detailed in the commentary on 1:15, the feet being described in this way speak of judgment on works. It is of these works that the Lord will next refer to.

Life application: Thyatira is the smallest of the seven cities being addressed, and yet it has some very big problems as will be seen.

Christ's eyes burn through any attempt at hiding sin and get to the very heart of the matter, piercing deeply into the soul of man and into the workings of His churches. Nothing in creation is concealed before His piercing gaze.

Further, the judgment of Christ is absolute. It is without bias, it is based on an ultimate standard of perfection, and it is final when rendered.

Churches and congregants that fail to heed the symbolism of how Christ is depicted, and who ignore what that symbolism means in reality, are setting themselves up for real trouble. All humanity is accountable to Jesus Christ for their actions, and every church will be judged by Him in its actions as well. Let us pay heed and ensure that we are living in accord with what is learned here in these opening letters to these seven churches.

Lord, understanding that You see every sin, know every thought, and will judge every action, we ask that You guide us in our walk so that our lives will be acceptable to You. On our own, we mess up at every turn, but if we follow You, it is certain that our steps will be proper. Keep us from straying, and lead us on paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. Amen.

"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last *are* more than the first. Revelation 2:19

Jesus once again states, "I know your works," as He has in the first three letters. He is letting those in Thyatira know that He is monitoring them and evaluating their actions. From there, translations vary. Some state these as five various categories –

Works, love, service, faith, and patience.

Some state these as four qualifiers of "works." In other words, the works are –

Love, service, faith, and patience.

In the Greek, the word “and” precedes “love,” and so the first option is most likely. The Lord is aware of the works of those in Thyatira, and of the other four attributes that they display. These four attributes are –

Love – This is to be taken as love in general. Their works included affection and benevolence towards those they ministered to. This is something mentioned by the author of Hebrews saying, “For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10).

Service – The word *diakonia* gives the sense of waiting at a table. It stems from two words, *dia* (through) and *konis* (dust). Thus, it is one who scurries through the dust. In other words, it extends to the ministry of those who actively assist in duties in a willing attitude.

Faith – This can extend to both belief and faithfulness. HELPS Word Studies notes that it “is always a *gift from God*, and *never* something that can be produced by people. In short, 4102*/pistis* (‘faith’) for the believer is ‘God's *divine persuasion*’ – and therefore distinct from human belief (confidence), yet involving it.” Those at Thyatira had displayed faith in a manner acceptable to the Lord.

Patience – The word gives the sense of “perseverance.” Those in Thyatira had remained steadfast in their efforts through whatever situation life handed them, be it ease or tribulation.

These attributes are acknowledged by the Lord as points to be complimented. And more, He says, “and as for your works, the last *are* more than the first.” This then goes back to the original thought concerning “I know your works.” Those works that they had accomplished were more abundant than when they had begun their walk of faith.

It should be noted, as has occurred in many verses already, there are differences in the Greek texts which cause the verse to be read somewhat differently. Reading a multitude of translations will help the reader see these differences and will give him a chance to reflect on which translation makes the most sense.

Life application: The works of those at Thyatira as individuals and collectively brought glory and honor to the Lord. They continued on doing good after the initial spurt of

works normally sputters. So, we should likewise continue on, not letting slip that which we began doing.

They were growing in their good deeds. In their love, the things they did were being done for the honor of Jesus, not self. The love they had for the Lord wasn't diminished and their works remained directed towards His glory. In like manner, we should keep our love towards Christ fresh and vibrant. In this, our labors of love will also reflect our love of the Lord.

In their service, the people were willing to do the jobs of service without fear of getting their feet dirty. Are we willing to humble ourselves in whatever manner is needed in order to serve others? If so, the Lord will be pleased with that expression of ourselves.

Their faith is noted just as the ancients were commended for it, as is recorded in Hebrews 11. Too often people get misdirected in their faith and everything else gets misdirected with it. But because of properly directed faith, their other areas of spiritual growth were also properly aligned.

Finally, their patience was the result of a close walk with the Lord and a clear communion with the Holy Spirit. When we have our eyes properly directed on the Lord and our minds and souls in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, we can work patiently through any suffering or affliction.

O God, if only we could consistently emulate those things that You find commendable in the people mentioned in the Bible. It is certain that we all fail You often in our thoughts, words and deeds. And so, help us in this. Strengthen us and give us the resolute and determined purpose to continue to grow in our spiritual walk. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. Revelation 2:20

After providing words of encouragement to the church in Thyatira, the Lord now brings a rebuke against them. This is indicated by saying, "Nevertheless." It is the simple Greek word *alla*, signifying but, however, except, and so on. It is now given to contrast His previous words. After this, He says, "I have a few things against you."

Some manuscripts leave off "a few things," and simply say, "I have this against you." As He only addresses one main issue, this is probably correct. Despite consisting of several

detailed verses concerning the matter, it is one main subject. That begins with, “because you allow that woman Jezebel...”

First, the term, “that woman,” can also be translated as “your wife.” Some translations will say this. The reason this would be appropriate is because Jezebel was a wife to King Ahab of Israel’s past. Thus, Jesus would be making a connection here in that manner. Either way, the reference is to the wicked Jezebel.

Of this name, Vincent’s Word Studies provides a lengthy and well-laid out synopsis of who the original Jezebel was, and why that name is now being used figuratively of someone in the church. For those who are unaware of her, his words are provided –

“Used symbolically, but with reference to the notorious historic Jezebel. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon (1 Kings 16:31), formerly a priest of Astarte, and who had made his way to the throne by the murder of his predecessor Pheles. Ahab's marriage with her was the first instance of a marriage with a heathen princess of a king of the northern kingdom of Israel. This alliance was a turning-point in the moral history of the kingdom. From the times of David and Solomon many treaties had been concluded between Phoenicia and Israel; but it was at the same time the special business of the kingdom of the ten tribes to restore the ancient rigidness of the nationality of Israel. Jezebel looked down with perverse pride upon a people whose religion she neither understood nor respected. Though the ten tribes had yielded to idolatry in the worship of the calves, the true God was still worshipped and the law of Moses acknowledged. From the time of Ahab's marriage the apostasy of Israel became more decided and deadly. She was ‘a woman in whom, with the reckless and licentious habits of an Oriental queen, were united the fiercest and sternest qualities inherent in the old Semitic race. Her husband, in whom generous and gentle feelings were not wanting, was yet of a weak and yielding character which soon made him a tool in her hands.... The wild license of her life and the magical fascination of her arts or her character became a proverb in the nation. Round her and from her, in different degrees of nearness, is evolved the awful drama of the most eventful crisis of this portion of the Israelite history’ (Stanley, ‘Jewish Church’). She sought to exterminate the prophets of Jehovah (1 Kings 18:13), and inaugurated the worship of Baal the Sun-God on a magnificent scale. Two sanctuaries were established, one for each of the great Phoenician deities, at each of the two new capitals of the kingdom, Samaria and Jezreel. The sanctuary of Astarte or Ashtaroth (the Phoenician Venus) at Jezreel was under Jezebel's special sanction, and there is reason to suppose that she ministered as a priestess in that licentious worship. Four hundred priests or prophets were attached to this sanctuary and were supported at her table. The sanctuary to Baal at Samaria was large enough to contain all the worshippers of the northern kingdom. Its staff consisted

of four hundred and fifty priests, and the interior contained representations of the Sun-God on small pillars, while a large statue of the same deity was set up in front. At these sanctuaries Ahab in person offered sacrifices."

In using the term "Jezebel," Jesus is calling to mind this atrocious figure from past redemptive history. In this, He is saying that her qualities and attributes are seen again in the church of Thyatira. It must be noted that it is not said that this woman is commended, but rather she is allowed. The word is *aphiémi*. It means to permit, allow, tolerate, and so on. They are tolerating that which should not be tolerated. However, tolerating evil cannot be condoned. Next, Jesus says, "who calls herself a prophetess."

The words stand out as clearly meaning that this person is not a prophetess at all. Later in Revelation, it says, "Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (19:10). True prophecy comes from God. If Jesus is rebuking the church over this woman, it is obvious that her claims to being a "prophetess" are false.

But this is the claim of countless people throughout the church age. Many claim to be prophets or prophetesses even though the Bible is written and complete. There is no longer a need for prophecy because believers are now to live by faith and not by sight. If the words of these false prophets were true, then that would contradict the premise of living by faith.

Further, another abuse of this woman, called here Jezebel, is next seen in the words, "to teach." Paul's words, which are prescriptive for the church, state –

> "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. **12** And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." 1 Timothy 2:11, 12

This Jezebel has no authority to teach men, and yet she does, as is evidenced by the use of the masculine word "servants." She is a false prophetess and an unauthorized teacher. Further, what she is teaching is completely contradictory to what is morally acceptable, which is to "seduce my servants."

The word translated as "seduce" is *planaó*. It signifies "to cause to wander." Thus, one is led astray. It is the basis for our word "planet." Even as the planets appear to wander in the night sky, so a person who is led astray will wander. They have no sure footing and are easily led down unhealthy paths of unrighteousness. Christ came to put us on the proper path. The apostolic writings are intended to keep us on that path, but false prophets and false teachers set about to cause people to stray from it. In the case of the vile Jezebel, her doctrine is to have the servants of the Lord "commit sexual immorality."

The Greek word can be taken both literally and figuratively. In the case of it being figurative, it is used in leading people astray from Christ and into idolatry. In this case, it is certainly to be taken literally. The reason why is that she also is said to lead them into idolatry. Therefore, she is both physically immoral, and uses that to seduce people away from sound doctrine concerning moral purity (see 1 Corinthians 6:18 and 10:8 for examples). Also, she is spiritually immoral, leading people into idolatry as well.

The second thought, that of spiritual harlotry, is seen in the final words which say, "and eat things sacrificed to idols." This must be understood from the allowances and prohibitions of Paul concerning the matter of acceptable food and the sake of conscience. To understand this, a detailed study of the subject from 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 must be conducted. That commentary can be found on The Superior Word website or on Sermon Audio (look for the 1 Corinthians Commentary)

In the end, the matter comes down to conscience. What is obvious is that this revolting woman, Jezebel, was working in a manner contrary to what Paul had stated in those verses, causing the believers to violate the law of conscience. In this, they then violate the law of faith. As Paul says elsewhere, "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does* not eat from faith; for whatever *is* not from faith is sin."

Finally, whether Jezebel is an actual person – a single individual who was a member of the church at Thyatira – who conducted her affairs in this despicable manner, or whether she is used symbolically concerning a heretical doctrine that had arisen within the church (something that appears less likely, but is still possible), the doctrine was there, and it was left unchecked. Jesus is not pleased with this.

Life application: It is unfortunate that people have continued to call themselves prophets and prophetesses through the church age. Claiming such a title normally includes the perception that they receive revelation from God. This is certainly not the case. The Bible is the rule and guide for faith within the church, and claims of extra-biblical revelation are not to be accepted – ever.

The Bible is written, and it alone stands as our rule and guide for the conduct of our Christian lives. There is nothing such a person could "prophesy" that would have any use beyond what Scripture proclaims. Countless millions have been led astray by people who have claimed prophetic revelation. Anytime you accept such from someone, you are opening yourself up to manipulation by a false teacher. Stick to the word. What more could you possibly need for your Christian walk?

Lord, unless we are well versed in Your word, it is often hard to know when someone is presenting a truthful message, or when someone is simply taking verses out of context and applying them in a way that twists the truth. Please keep us from being manipulated by deceivers, and help us to more fully grasp the right and true doctrines of Your word. Give us the hunger and desire to want more of Your precious word day by day. Amen.

And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.
Revelation 2:21

Some of the Greek texts, rather than saying, "and she did not repent," say "she is unwilling to repent." That is certainly more in line with Paul's words in the book of Romans –

> "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance,
> and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" Romans 2:4

In this, the state of mind is more genuinely expressed because there must be a willingness to repent in order for true repentance to take place. Understanding this, and still speaking of "Jezebel," Jesus says, "And I gave her time to repent." It is apparent that this woman has been in the congregation. As such, she would see from their works, love, service, faith, and patience (verse 2:19) that there was a proper way to conduct oneself.

However, time is not what this person needed. The allowance of time was to demonstrate this. She failed to "repent of her sexual immorality." Despite clearly knowing that what she was doing was wrong, she refused to turn from her ways. It reflects a condition of the heart. In such a state, Jesus says, "and she did not repent."

Repentance simply means, "to change one's mind." There is a difference between a person who is addicted to drugs and who truly desires to not be addicted to drugs, and a person who is addicted to drugs and who is unwilling to give them up. The state of mind is what is evaluated, not necessarily the taking of the drugs. The state of mind is what will potentially lead to ending the addiction. But if the state of mind is unyielding, there will never be a true change.

It is evident that Jezebel had no desire to turn from her sexual immorality. Because of this, Jesus has a harsh sentence coming upon her in the verses ahead. She will receive her just due because she failed to accept the words of Scripture that tell us it will eventually come –

> "The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9

Life application: The God of the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, is accused of being harsh and angry without demonstrating mercy and patience. However, from the earliest pages of the Bible in Genesis, even to the last pages of the Bible in Revelation, a completely different view of God is given.

Abraham was promised that his descendants would receive the land of Canaan as an inheritance, but it wouldn't be given to him right away. The reason is given at the time of the covenant in Genesis 15:15, 16 –

> "Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. **16** But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete."

God gave the people in the land 400 years more to repent and to seek Him out, but in the end, there was simply no remedy. The same is true with the people of Israel in Isaiah–

> "I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people,
> Who walk in a way *that is* not good,
> According to their own thoughts." Isaiah 65:2

Were God to destroy humans every time they sinned, there would be no humans on earth in a single day. Were God to give humans a week to repent and then destroy them, there would be no humans at the end of the week. People who point fingers at, and accuse, God simply deny the reality of their own state. They rule that God is unfair to judge them when in fact He is more than fair.

Jezebel was given time to repent as well… "and she did not." Churches that mix shrines and relics in with their worship will be held accountable. Churches that mingle humanistic philosophies and ideologies with proper worship will be held accountable. Mingling the holy with the profane is intolerable and will be punished. This is reality and this is just. Pointing one's finger at God is merely a reflection of a problem with self, not a problem with God.

> "He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
> Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

[11] For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
[12] As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:10-12

We know, O Lord, that if You were to count our sins against us as we deserve, none could stand in Your presence. But You are merciful and abundant in kindness to the children of men. Cleanse us Lord. Sprinkle us with the blood of Christ and we will be clean. Thank You for the forgiveness that comes through His mighty and glorious deeds. Amen.

Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. Revelation 2:22

Of the strumpet Jezebel who was given time to repent of her sexual immorality, but who failed to repent, Jesus now pronounces a sentence upon her, beginning with, "Indeed." It is a note of absolute certainty that action is coming. That action is, "I will cast her into a sickbed."

The Greek word merely signifies a bed. However, "sickbed," or "bed of suffering," is to be inferred. As Charles Ellicott rightly states, "The chamber of voluptuousness will become the chamber of sickness. The spot of the sin shall be the scene of punishment." The harlot will go from the carnal delights of her fornication to the consequences of it. It is too late because she has failed to repent.

In this, one can see a parallel to what happened to Ahab, the king of Israel. He had committed a great sin, and the promise was made that, because of his sin, there would be consequent punishments laid upon him –

> Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, [18] "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who *lives* in Samaria. There *he is,* in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. [19] You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Have you murdered and also taken possession?"' And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.'" 1 Kings 21:17-19

Such things were promised to occur in the case of Jezebel so that those who saw it would know that the Lord's hand was in the judgment. The word is spoken before the punishment so that, when it comes about, others could see and turn from their wicked ways. But just the promise of the punishment is hoped to be enough for some. In the

case of those who joined in the sins of this Jezebel, a word of warning is given. Jesus next says, “and those who commit adultery with her.”

The verb is a present participle – “those committing adultery with her.” Jesus’ words to the church remind them that He is aware of all that is occurring there (“I know your works” of verse 2:19). By saying “those committing adultery with her,” He is letting them know that they are not exempt from what is promised to come upon the woman Jezebel. Rather, He will cast them “into great tribulation.”

It is the same word, *thlipsis*, used earlier in verses 2:9 and 2:10. It is variously translated as persecution, tribulation, affliction, distress, and so on. It signifies pressure. It is as if one is in a narrow place, hemmed in and feeling confined, and thus without options. One might say, “There is no way to escape.” However, added to it here is the adjective *megas*, or “great.” Those who are engaging in the sin with Jezebel will face the horrible consequences of their actions.

But, in this, they are given a note of grace. Jesus says, “unless they repent of their deeds.” Jezebel’s time was up. She was too far gone, and the disease that was promised would take hold of her. Jesus knew this and His words to her are not one of warning, but of judgment. However, the men of the church – being warned of her affliction – are given the chance to retreat from her, turn from the evil she had introduced, and not catch whatever STD she was surely carrying.

Those who failed to heed the word of the Lord would suffer the consequences of their actions. Those who heeded would be spared. They would learn the lesson vicariously through what they would see in the unrepentant.

In this presentation of Jezebel, one can see an equivalent in the spiritual adulteries of Israel and Judah. The people of Judah had an example of the consequence of what would occur because of their actions of going after other gods (spiritual adultery) in the northern kingdom of Israel. And yet, they went ahead and committed the same actions against the Lord. For example –

> The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: Have you seen
> what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and
> under every green tree, and there played the harlot. **7** And I said, after she had
> done all these *things,* ‘Return to Me.’ But she did not return. And her
> treacherous sister Judah saw it. **8** Then I saw that for all the causes for which
> backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a
> certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and

played the harlot also. [9] So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. [10] And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the LORD. Jeremiah 3:6-10

The Lord notes this same type of thing elsewhere in the prophets, but even after having seen the adulteries of the northern tribes, and the consequences of their actions, Judah failed to repent. The Lord thus judged them for their failures, packing them off to Babylon in exile.

Life application: It is the Lord's intention that people turn from their wickedness. However, there is a time when there is no longer a remedy for such aberrant behavior. Concerning the church at Thyatira, the means of such judgment isn't hard to imagine. Sexual sins, throughout the ages, have led to the explosion of disease. Entire villages, cultures, and groups of people are destroyed through such diseases. For example, it occurred in Athens in 430BC. At that time, one-third of the people there died. AIDS is certainly such a punishment on sexual sin, as are syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases.

No matter how the sickbed of Jezebel came, it was the result of her sins, and through rejecting the truth and beauty of properly conducted life in Christ. Jesus asks us to turn from such things before they bring about unimaginable pain and agony.

In comparison to Jezebel of the Old Testament, Jesus promised that this New Testament Jezebel would be cast onto a sickbed. Such a violent casting is reminiscent of Jezebel's final moments as she was hurled out of the window on a high wall – "…she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window. …Then he said, 'Throw her down.' So they threw her down, and *some* of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot. … So they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of *her* hands" (Portions of 1 Kings 9:30-35).

The casting of Jezebel in 1 Kings resulted in a gruesome end. The casting of the Jezebel in Revelation would be no less intense as she suffered the consequences of her actions. These examples are given to show us that we can all expect to face consequences for the things we do. Let us pay heed.

Lord God, we know that we have choices to make and that we must face the consequences of our own free-will. Our choice, as believers, is to follow you, and our will is to serve You with wholehearted devotion. Thank You for the release from sin and its

consequences because of the New Covenant You have granted to us through the shed blood of Christ. We love You Lord God. Amen.

I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Revelation 2:23

Jesus, still referring to the wicked woman Jezebel, continues with the promised punishments resulting from her actions. In this, He beings with, "I will kill her children with death." The words of this first clause are emphatic, with the stress on "children." Further, the word *en*, or in, is used. It says, "And the children of her I will kill in death." The same phrase *en thanatō*, or "in death" is also used in verse 6:8. The word "children" here does not mean literal children, as will be explained below. It is the unrepentant offshoot (child) of a corrupt teacher who would be subject to judgment as well.

Placing the children in the emphatic position sets these people off as a different category than those referred to in the previous verse. There, it said, "and those who commit adultery with her." The Lord said that He would punish them "unless they repent." However, no such grant of grace is extended to "her children."

What this is probably conveying then is a reference to those who have been "begotten" by her into her wicked ways. They haven't simply committed sin with her, but they are converts to her ways. This is seen, for example, in the words of Paul to the Corinthians –

> "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn *you.* **15** For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do* not *have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. **16** Therefore I urge you, imitate me." 1 Corinthians 4: 14-16

Paul makes a similar statement in Philemon -10. Because they have taken on her perverse nature, they have never been converted to Christ. Thus, without ever having the gift of salvation, they will be killed "in death." The meaning of this is debated, but because the word "kill" is used both here and in Revelation 6:8, it is probably speaking of a form of death, as most translations render it in 6:8, such as "plague," "pestilence," or something similar.

In other words, verse 6:8 says, "And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth." One might get hit by a sword and live. One might be hungry, almost to starvation, and live. On might get attacked by a beast and live. However, the plague of "death" results in certain

death. Once it attacks, the state of death is assured. Thus, to state, “I will kill her children with death,” is a way of showing the surety of what will occur. There is no hope of pulling through whatever affliction they face.

In this, Jesus says, “and all the churches shall know.” What will occur will be so obvious, so purposeful, and so complete in its scope, that what occurs will not be limited to just one church. Rather, all of the churches will hear of it and know that it came about because of judgment. The children of Jezebel – those begotten of her and her wicked ways – will be an example to all. In this, they will understand when Jesus says, “that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.”

The phrase, as spoken by Jesus, is a clear and unambiguous claim that He is the Lord (Yehovah) of the Old Testament Scriptures. Time and again, searching the heart and/or mind of others is something that exclusively belongs to the Lord. For example –

> “I, the LORD, search the heart,
> *I* test the mind,
> Even to give every man according to his ways,
> According to the fruit of his doings.” Jeremiah 17:10

This reference in Jeremiah is the exact claim of Jesus in Revelation. He 1) searches out the hearts and the minds, 2) rewards according to the ways that He has sought out. In the New Testament, this same action is also attributed to the Spirit of God. As Paul says–

> “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is,* because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of* God.” Romans 8:27

One can see the harmony of the doctrine of the Trinity when these verses are properly considered. Each member of the Godhead performs the actions appropriate to the situation and the circumstance of the events, and all of them are in harmony with the actions of the other two members. As Jesus next says, “And I will give to each one of you according to your works.”

Here, Jesus shows that His actions against Jezebel’s “children” extend to all in the church who are involved with her. Whatever a person does, good or bad – the actions, intents, and fruits – will all be evaluated and rewarded accordingly. We can be confident of this because of the example seen here. God is no respecter of persons. What He decides will be completely impartial, completely fair, and all matters will be brought to their proper end by Him. Jesus is the One to determine these things.

Life application: Far too often, people make the mistake of speaking of God's love while ignoring His judgment. Jezebel and "her children" would not be the recipients of His love.

It can be inferred that if Jesus cast her on a sickbed of suffering, the chances are that whatever communicable disease she got spread through her followers as well. But this is probably speaking of more than just physical death for these "children."

In saying that they are her children, it indicates that they never received the truth of the gospel. Therefore, they would not just die a certain death, but they would also die the second death in the Lake of Fire. Such is the nature of appropriate divine judgment, and such is the nature of God's wrath on sin for those who are never begotten of God through Christ.

Despite the terrifying nature of the words of the Lord here, we must remember that Jesus is a fair judge. What He determines will never be biased or vindictive. Rather, it will be perfectly just for all people. Believers have the full assurance of eternal salvation and rewards based on their faithful service. How much better is this than the prospect of eternal separation from God! Live for Jesus and bask in His grace.

Lord God, please change the hearts of those who are sinning, strengthen the hearts of those who are struggling, and continue to bless the hearts of those who are standing strong and faithfully in You. For those who have never come to You through Christ Jesus, move in a great way in this world so that they will want to have what is so wonderfully offered by You. May they see and call out for salvation through His precious shed blood. May it be so, in His wonderful name! Amen.

"Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. Revelation 2:24

There are two main changes between this text and other Greek texts. The words "and" and "will" are not found in them. Including the word "and" gives an inappropriate sense of what is being said to the various addressees. Instead, saying, "Now to you I say, to the rest in Thyatira," provides a logical division between those already addressed who had been a part of the inappropriate actions of Jezebel and the others. The inclusion of the word "and" eliminates this important division.

Jesus is speaking to all "the rest in Thyatira." He then explains that by saying, "as many as do not have this doctrine." With these words, one can more clearly see why the word

“and” is inappropriate. He has given His words of correction and warning to those who held to her doctrine. He now addresses those who do not. They are those “who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say.”

The words here are variously explained. First, is the term used by these people, “the depths,” which is then qualified by Jesus as “of Satan,” or is the term used by these people, “the depths of Satan”? It isn’t known for certain, but it seems unlikely that a supposed group of Christians would claim they followed “the depths of Satan.” Another option is that the saying was used by those who were not a part of this group. Looking from the outside, they may have said in an ironic manner, “They claim they know the depths of God, but they are caught up in the depths of Satan.”

This is not uncommon, even to this day. When an aberrant cult is noted for their incorrect doctrine, they are acknowledged as such. The cult – for example, the Mormons – might say, “We are the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.” But those who understand their aberrant doctrine might say, “You are followers of the teachings of Satan.”

Whatever the intent here is, Jesus clearly identifies their doctrine as aligned with Satan, just as He had done when using the term “synagogue of Satan” in verse 2:9. Many involved commentaries talk about what the term, “the depths of Satan,” means. But they are unnecessary. Jesus has already explained the behavior of Jezebel and those who committed her many offenses with her.

She was obviously claiming that her conduct was a deep teaching that could only be fully appreciated by those who followed her. She was claiming that her path was the true path to higher enlightenment and communing with God. But in fact, it was an alignment with the works of the devil. For those who had not followed her, Jesus then says, “I will put on you no other burden.”

Some see this as a connection to the trials and sufferings a church may face. But that conclusion doesn’t logically follow in light of this verse. Rather, Jesus is saying that the conduct of the church is acceptable (verse 2:19), but they needed to remove the wicked strumpet Jezebel from the congregation. With that, He would be pleased, and He would add nothing else to consider them a church in right standing. She was the main hindrance to a positive relationship with the Lord. Once she was removed, there would be a harmonious relationship between them and Him.

<u>Life application:</u> In addition to their faithful service, the church at Thyatira had kept away from what was obviously wrong in Jezebel’s doings. However, they had not

excommunicated her. She was most likely teaching doctrines which supposedly revealed deeper and hidden truths of God, something that cults have continuously done since then as well. The problem was that the things she taught were neither "truths," nor were they "of God."

Her proclamations and actions came from Satan, and Satan's teachings are always false and destructive. As Jesus said in John 8:44, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

Always be careful of someone who proclaims "something deeper" or "something new." Check everything you hear against the Bible, and also be cognizant of what has been considered orthodox throughout church history. Jesus Christ doesn't change and neither does the word that proclaims Him. Hold steadfast to sound doctrine and His instructions won't be burdensome.

Thank You, Lord God, for the promise of teaching us if we will just listen to Your words. Thank You also for the promise of the glory that lies ahead which You promise to Your redeemed people. In this troubled world of strife and anguish, the promise of rest is our hearts' desire. Our hearts sing out in joy at the prospect of sharing eternity with such a kind and wonderful Savior – Jesus – whom You sent to bring us back to You! Hallelujah to Your name. Amen.

But hold fast what you have till I come. Revelation 2:25

Jesus just noted that He would place no other burden on the faithful of Thyatira other than no longer tolerating the horrific woman Jezebel. They needed to clean that up in their church and continue on in their works, love, service, faith, and patience mentioned in verse 2:19. With that understood, He now next states, "But."

The Greek word is an adverb, *plen*, that is less commonly used than other conjunctions. It gives the sense of "except," or "nevertheless." This is its only use in Revelation. With this fixed in the reader's mind, He says, "hold fast what you have."

Those would be the positive qualities mentioned above. They have those favorable traits. The Lord is pleased with them. And, if they will simply cut out the tolerance for Jezebel and those who would participate with her, the Lord will add no other burden on them. The church will continue on, standing approved in His presence. And that will be, as He says, "till I come."

The Greek reads, “until which (time) I might come.” The words are accentuated by an untranslated particle, *an*. The inclusion of this particle stamps the time of His coming as indefinite. His return will be whenever it will be, and the church is not privy to when it will be. But the fact is that the promise of His coming remains. As He said in John 14 –

> “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so,* I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.”
>
> -John 14:2, 3

Life application: Short and to the point… to the faithful in Thyatira, Jesus – who has already acknowledged their good points – asks them to “hold fast.” When an individual or a group is doing what is right, it is often difficult to continue on as things deteriorate around them or attacks come against them. But Jesus is aware of our weaknesses and limitations, and His words here show that He isn’t there to place additional burdens on those who are doing the right thing. Instead, He asks them to simply “hold fast,” even if the time is indefinite – He will come.

In this, there is a time for the works to end and the relief to come. The beauty of what Jesus did was to leave that moment unknown to His children. By promising to return, but by not giving us the date, it could be at any moment. The anticipation of His return, therefore, should be on the minds of all who have called on Him in two ways:

1) They should be of the mind that what they are doing is of eternal effect in the lives of others. This is because if they don’t go about their business and the Lord comes, then those they neglected will never have the knowledge which leads them to salvation.

2) They should be aware that if what they are doing is inappropriate or disobedient, then their last deeds before the judgment will be open and exposed as insufficient for commendation.

Jesus is coming and, though we are hindered by the knowledge of when that that will be, we are also bolstered by that same fact. The masterful plan of Jesus is that He is coming, and therefore we should all be about His business every moment of our lives. Should He tarry, all we can do is praise Him for His patience in dealing with the wayward sons of Adam. Let us remember the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10 –

> “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true

God, [10] and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

How good it is to know that we could be in the generation that experiences Your return for the church. May this be a motivating factor in our wanting to continue on despite trials, setbacks, and frustrations! O Lord, may You be pleased with the conduct of our lives as we hold fast to doing the good works which are pleasing to You. Amen.

And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— Revelation 2:26

This verse is the beginning verse of the fourth set of honors (this time to those in Thyatira) promised to the one who "overcomes." Such a person, as previously noted, is the one who believes in Jesus Christ – the God/Man, calling on His name and being cleansed by the power of His shed blood. That was summed up 1 John 5:4, 5 –

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. [5] Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Jesus next adds on a note of perseverance, "and keeps My works until the end." It is a phrase found only here in the New Testament. It implies that not everyone who is saved (which is eternal) will be given this power. This is obvious, because of how the term "overcome" is defined elsewhere (including the quote from 1 John 5). There is eternal salvation, but there are also promised blessings for those who persevere in their salvation.

This then is a special blessing to those who not only call on Jesus Christ for salvation, but those who also keep His works. The promised blessing then falls under the category of "rewards" as outlined by Paul –

"If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:14, 15

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." 2 Corinthians 5:10

It is with this thought, that Jesus' words are speaking of rewards for perseverance, that He next says, "to him I will give power over the nations." The word "power" speaks of control or authority. It is an authority given by God to His saints. In its reception, they have authority and ability to act according to His will.

That this is speaking of a granted authority based on perseverance, and not an authority given to all who are saved, is seen in Jesus' parable concerning the minas, found in Luke 19:11-27. There, Jesus shows that the greater the faithfulness, the greater the responsibility that will be granted to those over the cities. That parable is referring to the kingdom age.

The same idea is conveyed here. The change from "cities" to "nations" is noteworthy. The Greek word is *ethnōn*. It speaks of the heathen world in contrast to the nation of Israel. Those faithful in Israel during the kingdom age are given rule over cities. Those faithful in the church will be given rule over nations. Jesus will continue to explain this in the next verses.

Life application: There will actually be some who are taken up at the rapture who will be completely surprised by the event. We read this in 2 Peter 1:9 –

> "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins."

Peter is speaking about a person who "was cleansed from his old sins" and yet had forgotten about it. This person won't be the ruler of the nations, but will spend his time watching others, who were faithful in their walk, exercising authority that they will be denied. Obviously, there will be many gradations between the two as well.

The Lord will be perfectly just in His judgments, and also in the doling out of rewards to His faithful. What will be the anticipated rewards for you? Only you can set the course for them now. Make sure that you don't fall away from the sure rewards that await those who remain steadfast in Christ!

Lord, we are all so very prone to falling away from the full attention we should give to our Christian responsibilities. Therefore, we ask that You guide us, carry us, and strengthen us as we go forth. Keep us from falling away, or even being faithful but unproductive followers of You. Help ensure our lives are properly directed to the things that You deem proper and appropriate in our Christian walk. Amen.

‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—
as I also have received from My Father; Revelation 2:27

The words of this verse are in the middle of the honors bestowed upon those who “overcome” in Christ. Here, He will now note that they will share in His triumph and will – together with Him – rule the nations. It is based on a promise made to Christ from Psalm 2:7-9 –

> “I will declare the decree:
> The LORD has said to Me,
> ‘You *are* My Son,
> Today I have begotten You.
> **8** Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
> The nations *for* Your inheritance,
> And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.
> **9** You shall break them with a rod of iron;
> You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’”

Understanding the context, Jesus begins the words of this verse with, “He shall rule them with a rod of iron.” The word translated as “rule” actually means “to shepherd.” It is used, for example, of the coming Christ in Matthew 2:6 –

> “But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah,
> Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
> For out of you shall come a Ruler
> Who will **shepherd** My people Israel.”

The word translated as “rod” carries with it the sense of authority, and thus it is a scepter. That is the intent of the word here. It is found in that same manner in Hebrews 1:8 –

> “Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever;
> A scepter of righteousness *is* the **scepter** of Your kingdom.”

This rod, or scepter, being iron has its own meaning. In the Bible, iron represents strength, be it in binding together, in government, in hard service, in bondage, etc. For this reason, Albert Barnes rightly notes –

"To rule with a scepter of iron, is not to rule with a harsh and tyrannical sway, but with power that is firm and invincible. It denotes a government of strength, or one that cannot be successfully opposed; one in which the subjects are effectually subdued."

Understanding this, Jesus next says, "They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels." The verb in the Greek is present tense, and thus it should read "as the vessels of the potter are broken." It gives the vivid sense of watching the nations collapse from their previous states of exaltation, and being reduced to a homogenous blend of nations, subjugated before the rule of Christ. This will begin with the judgment of the nations, as spoken of by the Lord in Matthew 25:31-46. Of that, here are verses 32,33–

> "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. **33** And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left."

The sheep are the nations who will support and protect Israel during the Tribulation period. The goats are those who will be belligerent to her. How do we know this? It is because Jesus was speaking under the Old Covenant and about the Kingdom Age, not the Church Age (which was still a mystery according to Paul's later writings).

In His discourse in Matthew 25, Jesus refers to those needing help and comfort as "my brethren." Therefore, He is speaking of the Jews and is referring to the Tribulation as described in the book of Revelation. Jesus was, is, and always will be, a Jew. His brethren are the Jewish people. Those who are on Christ's side during the Tribulation will likewise support the nation of Israel. Take this note for understanding from Ezekiel 36:22–

> "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do *this* for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went."'"

A new order lies ahead during the millennial reign of Christ, to which these words are referring. This then is a temporal grant to those who not only overcome, but who keep Christ's work until the end (2:26). During the millennium, the anticipation of the prophets for a world ruled by Messiah from Jerusalem will come about. This is foretold many times in the prophets, but one example is –

> "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
> *That* the mountain of the LORD's house
> Shall be established on the top of the mountains,

And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it.
3 Many people shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
4 He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruninghooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore." Isaiah 2:2-4

This right to rule is then acknowledged by Jesus as the way it was intended. As He says, "as I also have received from My Father." This is what was promised to the coming Christ in Psalm 2. Jesus here acknowledges that it will be so, and He offers that right to rule to those who both overcome and who are faithful to keep His works now.

Life application: Despite their unfaithfulness, God's name is upon the Jewish people and He still has a plan and purpose for them. The Kingdom Age is coming, and Christ will rule from Jerusalem in the midst of His people Israel.

Lord God, help us to be faithful through the times of trouble. But also, Lord, help us to be faithful through the times of blessing. In either time, we can lose sight of what is most important, getting misdirected from our walk with You. Be with us, guide us, and keep us on the right path at all times. To Your glory alone. Amen.

and I will give him the morning star." Revelation 2:28

This verse ends the list of honors mentioned in the letter to Thyatira that will be granted to the one who overcomes. As clear as the words are, they are debated as to the actual meaning of what the Lord is saying. At the close of the Bible, we read these words in Revelation 22:16 –

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

Further, in 2 Peter, this is stated –

> "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;" 2 Peter 1:19

Peter's words are certainly speaking of Christ. Just three verses earlier, he said, "we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." The prophetic word, then, speaks of and anticipates the glories of Christ. It is what we now have to illuminate to us His majesty. Peter also refers to the dawning of the day. That is probably a reference to the words of Malachi –

> "But to you who fear My name
> The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
> With healing in His wings;
> And you shall go out
> And grow fat like stall-fed calves." Malachi 4:2

Jesus is both the Sun of Righteousness and the Bright and Morning Star. The major debate is whether Jesus is saying, "I will give of myself," because He is the "Morning Star," or is it saying something like, "I will make the dawn of salvation or of life eternal shine on him after his dark afflictions" (Expositors Greek Testament).

The main consideration is that of the idea of the dawning of the day. Malachi says, "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise." Peter says, "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Jesus says, "the morning star." All three speak of the time of transition from darkness to light. As the term in Revelation 22:16 is more exacting, a conclusion can be made based on that difference –

> *ton astera ton prōinon* – the star the morning (2:28)
> *ho aster ho lampros ho prōinos* – the star the bright the morning (22:16)

What then may be conveyed here is that any star (or planet) that remains in the sky as the sun rises would be like jewel in a crown. Albert Barnes agrees with this saying –

"The idea seems to be, that the Saviour would give him something that would resemble that morning planet in beauty and splendor - perhaps meaning that it would be placed as a gem in his diadem, and would sparkle on his brow - bearing some such relation to him who is called 'the Sun of Righteousness,' as the morning star does to the glorious sun on his rising. If so, the meaning would be that he would receive a beautiful ornament, bearing a near relation to the Redeemer himself as a bright sun - a pledge

that the darkness was past - but one whose beams would melt away into the superior light of the Redeemer himself, as the beams of the morning star are lost in the superior glory of the sun."

Life application: Whether Christ is saying He will give of Himself (which is already a true statement), or whether we will be together with Him as stars in glory (see Daniel 12:3), we will share in His goodness for all eternity. He will lead us to the still waters and the soft grass of the Garden lost so long ago. Although the Bible in general and Revelation in particular are full of judgment and woe, this judgment is on sin and those who act contrary to God's will. God gives us the choice and when we exercise it contrary to His ordinances, it is always at our own loss.

God is gracious and abundant in mercy, and He wants to lavish His goodness upon each of us. Because He created us, He knows what is best and what we should avoid. The prospect of sharing in/with the Person of Jesus for all eternity is the most wonderful prospect of all. He is the Bright Morning Star and the One who illuminates the splendor of God to us.

Like Peter's words (above), all of the prophetic word is meant to direct us and guide us to Jesus. It is a light shining in the dark world in which we live, and it is there to tell us of God's great love for us and His great Gift to us – Jesus. Don't miss the bigger picture of what God is doing by getting bogged down in judgment and destruction. These things are necessary in order for us to finally be at peace with our Creator.

O Lord God! Thank You so much for the promise that we have of forever dwelling in Your marvelous light. Thank You for Jesus our Lord who is the Bright and Morning Star. May we walk by His light and stay on the proper path until that great day when we are called to our true home. Thank You for your grace, your love, and your mercy! Amen.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 2:29

The thought is the same as that of verses 2:7, 2:11, and 2:17. However, there is now a difference, not in substance, but in location within the letter. In the first three letters, Jesus makes this statement, and then He speaks out the words concerning those who overcome. Here, and through the next three letters, the statement follows the words concerning those who overcome, closing out each letter.

As in all the letters, it is a call out to pay heed to what has been stated, and what will be stated to each and every church.

Life application: It seems all too fast that we have already come to the end of chapter 2 of Revelation, concluding with the completion of the fourth letter to the seven churches. Each letter has received the same warning and admonition as we have in this verse. Jesus says, "He who has an ear…" Let us open our ears and listen to what is being read, let us open our hearts and take heed to the message we have been given. Let us open our eyes that they may be fixed on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. The Lord said this to Isaiah concerning the people of Israel –

> "Go, and tell this people:
> 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
> Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'"
> **10** "Make the heart of this people dull,
> And their ears heavy,
> And shut their eyes;
> Lest they see with their eyes,
> And hear with their ears,
> And understand with their heart,
> And return and be healed." Isaiah 6:9, 10

Isaiah, not understanding, then responded –

> "Lord, how long?" (Isaiah 6:11)

And the response from the Lord was –

> "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant,
> The houses are without a man,
> The land is utterly desolate,
> **12** The LORD has removed men far away,
> And the forsaken places *are* many in the midst of the land." Isaiah 6:11, 12

We need to be attentive lest we drive ourselves out of our own favorable situation. Failure to respond to the Spirit's words can only result in sadness in an ineffective relationship with God.

Again, as before, this verse says "…what the Spirit says to the churches." Each letter is an individual one for a particular congregation, but it is directed to all churches at all times. The warnings, the promises, and the doctrine are meant for all. Take heed and be blessed!

Lord, You have given us a true and faithful record of Your love for us, Your expectations of us, and how we can share in Your divine blessings. Thank You, O God, for all You have done, are doing, and will do for Your redeemed people. May we return our praises to You. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,
'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Revelation 3:1

Chapter 3 begins with the address to the fifth church singled out by Jesus. He begins with, "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write." As before, the "angel" is probably a designation for the leader of the church, not an angelic being. The church is in "Sardis." In Greek, Sardis is a plural noun and is translated by the NET Bible as "Red Ones." The etymology of the name is uncertain.

Of Sardis, Charles Ellicott (1819-1905) writes –

"The modern *Sart*—now a mere village of paltry huts—once the capital of the old Lydian monarchy, and associated with the names of Crœsus, Cyrus, and Alexander. It was the great *entrepôt* of dyed woollen fabrics, the sheep of "many-flocked" Phrygia supplying the raw material. The art of dyeing is said to have been invented here; and many-coloured carpets or mats found in the houses of the wealthy were manufactured here. The metal known as electrum, a kind of bronze, was the produce of Sardis; and in early times gold-dust was found in the sand of the Pactolus, the little stream which passed through the Agora of Sardis, and washed the walls of the Temple of Cybele. It is said that gold and silver coins were first, minted at Sardis, and that resident merchants first became a class there. An earthquake laid it waste in the reign of Tiberius; a pestilence followed, but the city seems to have recovered its prosperity before the date of this epistle. The worship of Cybele was the prevailing one; its rites, like those of Dionysos and Aphrodite, encouraged impurity."

To the church in this location, Jesus' opening words are, "These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God." Here the symbology is different than presented in Revelation 1. Of the seven Spirits, it said, "and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne" (1:4). The Greek word translated as "has" signifies to have, hold, or possess. Christ is the One to whom these seven Spirits of God are ascribed. They are before the throne, but they are possessed by Christ. That was explained in the words of Isaiah 11 cited in the 1:4 commentary –

> "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
> And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
> **2** The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,

The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD." Isaiah 11:1, 2

Upon the Son rests the "sevenfold Spirit" – The Spirit of the (1) LORD, meaning Yehovah; the Spirit of (2) wisdom and (3) understanding; the Spirit of (4) counsel and (5) might; the Spirit of (6) knowledge and of (7) the fear of the LORD. Thus, He "has" or "possesses" these seven Spirits of God.

Further, Christ Jesus says to the church in Sardis, "and the seven stars." In verse 1:16, it noted that the seven stars were in His right hand. Those seven stars were explicitly explained in verse 1:20 as being "the angels of the seven churches." Being in His right hand, it then means that He has total control and authority over them. With this understood, He then says, "I know your works."

It is the same phrase repeated to each of the churches so far. He is letting each church know that He is fully aware of every deed they do. Nothing escapes His sight. With this said, He then explains what their most prominent works are with the words, "that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

Because of these words, it becomes clear why He chose to say to this church that He has the seven Spirits of God. He has the Spirit of Yehovah and thus possesses all authority. He has the Spirit of wisdom and will rightly apply that authority toward this dead church. He has the Spirit of understanding concerning their situation, their needs, their destiny, and so on. He has the Spirit of counsel to redirect them, if they will but listen. He has the Spirit of might to execute punishment upon them. He has the Spirit of knowledge that knows the end from the beginning and can lead the church in the correct path, if they will but follow. And, He has the Spirit of the fear of the Lord – something they currently lack (as will be seen), and which is necessary for them to also possess in order to avoid the promised judgment upon them.

The church at Sardis possessed all kinds of works. People saw the things they did and certainly passed on to others how industrious they were – "you have a name that you are alive." However, all the works in the world, without faith to accompany them, are useless. James speaks about faith without works being dead, but the truth is that any work not done in faith is of no value to the Lord.

<u>Life application:</u> As noted, the name Sardis means "Red Ones." It is fitting of a church full of dead people. Isaiah saw the need for cleansing from a dead-red condition almost eight hundred years earlier–

> "'Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the LORD, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool'" (Isaiah 1:18).

It isn't our "works" that will cleanse us. In fact, the things we do often separate us further from God. This is because we are trusting in ourselves to earn eternal life and are thus setting ourselves up as idols. It is amazing how the very things we think will earn God's favor only cause the division to widen. Jesus has done all that is necessary for us to be saved, and it is faith in Him alone that can justify us.

The health of the church is evaluated, and then Jesus exercises His authority. In the case of Sardis, the checking had been done and the church was found deficient. They, as a group, receive no commendation – only rebuke. Coming up in a few verses is a great word of comfort for some individuals though.

Lord, please look on our churches, and give us the desire to revitalize them in the areas where they are found spiritually dead. Help us to do works that are honoring of and for You. And Lord, help us to never trust in our deeds in order to obtain Your favor. Rather, let us do them only to bring You glory. Amen.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Revelation 3:2

The Lord just addressed the insufficiency of the church at Sardis. They have a name as if they are alive, but they are dead. Because of this, He says, "Be watchful." The Greek is a present participle. It should say, "Be waking." Having been called "dead," He is telling them that they are as if in a deadened slumber. But they were rather to stay awake and attentive. A good word to signify the intent is to remain vigilant. They are to be constantly on guard. Further, He says, "and strengthen the things which remain."

Not only were they to guard against those things that can come in and infect a church, but they were to bolster those things within the church that were of right quality and worthy of commendation. In the case of Sardis, it is a veiled note of commendation, without over-complementing them. They had things that were still of value, but they needed to shore them up for the long-term health of the church.

In this, the Lord doesn't tell them what is to be strengthened, but in a couple of verses, He will provide a note that there are still people of proper faith and conduct in the church. In order to strengthen the things that remained, it would be good to consult those people and find out what they are doing right.

Of those few things that remain, the Lord next says, “that are ready to die.” There is little left even in the good things they are doing. The embers of the fires are almost extinguished, but with a little breath brought upon them, they will begin to glow. In this, more of what is right and proper can be added, and the fire that had once been strong and active can, once again, be brought back to life. But for now, they were all but dead. As Jesus says, “for I have not found your works perfect before God.”

The word translated as “perfect,” here, signifies being fulfilled or completed. Their works failed to meet the appropriate end for which they were intended. God is the standard of all things. His perfection demands our perfection. His completion of things demonstrates our need to bring things to completion. Whatever was not being accomplished at Sardis needed to be brought to a satisfactory end.

If they were telling people about Jesus, they needed to then introduce the gospel – conveying the fact that their audience needed to believe in Jesus. If they were telling people that God is holy, they needed to then explain to the people that they too needed to be holy. Whatever the church at Sardis was doing, they failed to close up the loose theological ends. They produced no sufficiency of theology, and no soundness of faith.

<u>Life application:</u> All hope is not lost for those at Sardis, but they had really let things slip. Jesus warns them to:

Be watchful – they were relying on past deeds and not looking for new opportunities to move the church forward in a Christ-honoring way. They were also obviously not looking out for trouble that could infiltrate their worship, their doctrine, and their congregation. As the psalmist said so long ago –

> “I rise before the dawning of the morning,
> And cry for help;
> I hope in Your word.
> My eyes are awake through the *night* watches,
> That I may meditate on Your word.” Psalm 119:147, 148

The psalmist would rise early, petition God for help in his walk, put his trust in God’s word, and stay alert even in the night, always watchful for the enemy’s troubling attacks.

Strengthen the things that remain – there isn’t much good left, but they can at least shore up the walls of the few things they were getting right. Churches that have let things slip will normally still be strong in one area or another simply because they feel

their works will justify them. They won't of course, but these works aren't wrong in and of themselves. They just need to be redirected to the honoring of Jesus instead of some supposed self-justification.

In his closing, Jesus notes that He hasn't found their works perfect before God. This in no way indicates Jesus is less than God. As a member of the Godhead, He is subordinating Himself to it in this phrase. He is the second member of the Trinity and therefore He has a right to evaluate and make judgments on the works of His church and its members.

Lord Jesus, thank You for watching over our congregations and correcting us when necessary. On our own we tend to stray and get misdirected. So please keep us on the right and proper path which will honor You and keep us from personal boasting. To Your glory! Amen.

Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. Revelation 3:3

The Lord just said, "for I have not found your works perfect before God." Now, He tells them of the proper path to correct this, beginning with, "Remember therefore."

Those at Sardis were to call to mind the past, and then to consider it in light of their current situation. This is especially important because humans are prone to forgetting many things. Israel forgot their fear of the Lord when they received the Ten Commandments in a terrifying display of sound and sensational effects. No sooner had Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the rest of the law than the people fashioned a false god. Along with this they had a big party to celebrate it. Peter, in 2 Peter 1, gives a list of things to do in order to not forget their own salvation. In verse 9 there, he says –

> "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins." 2 Peter 1:9

One can get so far from remembering the Lord, that he can forget he is actually saved. But... the Lord does not forget. This is seen in the next words from Christ to the church at Sardis. He says, "how you have received and heard."

The two verbs are in different tenses. The verb translated as "have received" is in the perfect tense, indicative mood. It is an accomplished fact, and it is certain. The word translated as "heard" is an aorist verb, again in the indicative mood. It signifies the act of

hearing at the time it occurred, but they did – in fact – hear. As this is the case, Jesus next admonishes them to "hold fast and repent."

It sounds like Peter's words of 2 Peter 1. They are to hold fast so that they will not forget. As a church, they had not followed the advice of the apostles to increase in their knowledge and so forth, and they had almost forgotten who they were as a church. In this, they are instructed to change their mind (repent) of their direction, turn from it, and head in the right direction. If they do not, Jesus says he will take direct action. This is seen in the words, "Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief."

This goes back to the words of the previous verse, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain." He instructed them to do so, and now, in repeating that thought, he adds in His solemn warning. The words, "as a thief in the night," are given as a direct and unambiguous note that their time is short to return to a right path. There will not be another admonishment, but rather there will be judgment.

The term "thief in the night" is seen elsewhere, such as in 1 Thessalonians 5. It means at a completely unexpected time, and in a completely unexpected manner. When the thief comes at night, it could be at 9pm or 3am. And he could come in through the roof, or he could burrow in from underground. With darkness, these things are unknown.

It must be noted the Jesus is addressing the church as a whole. This does not mean that He is coming as a thief to steal away their individual salvation, nor could that be inferred. In fact, the very opposite of that is seen in the very next verse. He is speaking of judgment upon the church for their failure to properly handle its affairs.

With this understood, the Lord finishes the verse with, "and you will not know what hour I will come upon you." The Lord exactingly explains what "as a thief in the night" means with these words. His judgment will not be preceded by any warning. He has given almost all of His word through His apostles. He is now giving His final words through the hand of John. When Revelation is complete, the word of God is complete. The age of such inspired prophecy will have come to an end.

Understanding this, the letters to the seven churches are our guidance. There is a time coming when the church will be taken out at the rapture. When that occurs, the focus will be on the completion of the covenant promises to Israel. This will include all of the curses upon the world that are spoken of after these seven letters. When Christ comes for His church, it will be as that thief in the night. After that, it will be too late for taking the remedial action He now speaks of–

> “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. **2** For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. **3** For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’
> then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. **4** But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. **5** You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. **6** Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do,* but let us watch and be sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. **8** But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation. **9** For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10

Life application: Jesus asks those in Sardis to “remember.” The subject of remembering and forgetting, and the call to remember is mentioned many, many times in the Bible. In the 78th Psalm, we read this –

> They did not remember His power:
> The day when He redeemed them from the enemy, Psalm 78:42

Like Israel, who was redeemed from Egypt, the church in Sardis was redeemed from sin. But they both forgot that time and strayed from God. We likewise do the same and Jesus, through His seven letters, calls each of us to “remember.” We are to remember “how” we received and heard not just “what” we received and heard.

When our individual churches were established, it was with great joy, anticipation of glorifying the Lord, and being steadfast in our pursuit of Him. Our hearts were directed to the things of God, and we had a passion for His name. Jesus asks us to revisit that moment, hold fast to it, and repent (or turn back to it). If we fail to do so, He “will come upon” us as a thief. It will be sudden, and it will be final.

Those who aren’t ready at the rapture will be left behind to suffer through the tribulation period when the world will be plunged into complete disarray. Those who aren’t ready at their death will be separated from God eternally. And those who aren’t ready at the apostasy of a church won’t even know that they are being led down a road of error which will end in destruction. We need to be ever on guard and continuously “remember” our Lord and His mighty deeds which were done on our behalf.

Lord God, as the psalmist said so long ago, "I remember Your name in the night, O Lord, And I keep Your law." Help us to continuously ponder the great things You have done for us and to never forget Your love, grace, and mercy – all poured out on us at the cross. Thank You for Your patience and caring direction in our lives. Amen.

You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. Revelation 3:4

The third chapter of Revelation corresponds to the third letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The third letter, gimel, signifies "gather," or "walk." In this verse, the promise of walking with the Lord is given to those who are worthy.

As noted in the previous verse, the Lord has been addressing the entire church. Specifically, his words are to the "angel," meaning the leader, of the church. He stands as representative of the whole. In the previous verse, He gave a dire warning that if they don't repent, He will come upon them as a thief in the night. The whole church would fall under judgment. But now, he gives words of great encouragement to faithful believers who are stuck in an area that has only a bad church to attend, saying, "You have a few names even in Sardis."

The word "names" is given to represent individuals. There are some individuals who are in the church "who have not defiled their garments." The meaning of this permeates Scripture. Garments stand as representative of the spiritual state of the person. Jude spoke on the same lines as the Lord does here –

> And on some have compassion, making a distinction; **23** but others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.
>
> -Jude 1:23

Jude uses a different word, but the intent is the same. The book of Leviticus describes how to handle the effects of leprosy. One of the effects of this disease is that the garment itself could become a carrier, and therefore it was to be burned in order to prevent its infectious spread (Leviticus 13). Further, to touch any person, or any article touched by a person with a bodily discharge, would render the one touching him or it unclean (Leviticus 15, etc.). All of this was intended to convey spiritual concepts. Reading or watching the Superior Word sermons on those Leviticus verses will provide understanding on how this is so.

Again, this idea is seen also in the book of Zechariah –

[3]"Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.
[4] Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, 'Take away the filthy garments from him.' And to him He said, 'See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.'
[5] And I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.'
So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by." Zechariah 3:3-5

As is seen in that passage, the filthy garments are indicative of iniquity. The rich robes are then a state of being purified from that. Some individuals in Sardis had kept themselves pure and undefiled, even in the midst of this dead church. Jesus next says, "and they shall walk with Me in white."

The "white" here signifies complete purification because of the righteousness of Christ. These people stood justified because of their faith in Christ, they were not a part of the dead church, but were rather acceptable to Him. Their reward awaited them for the lives they lived. To complete the thought, Jesus next says, "for they are worthy."

Here, the state of these people is settled. There is no question concerning their salvation, nothing to pray about (Luke 21:36), and there is no hint that they could lose this. Rather, they were accepted, they were justified, and they will be glorified.

For these worthy people at Sardis, there must have been the thought that they were all alone in the world. But such is not the case. Throughout the world, and even in crummy churches, the Lord has a group of people who do understand His word, they accept Him by faith, and they live their lives in anticipation of His coming.

<u>Life application:</u> When people point fingers and accuse other churches of being wayward, they need to be careful to understand that even in bad churches there are good people. Jesus has had strong and disapproving words for the church at Sardis, and He certainly has strong and disapproving words for many churches and denominations in the world today. But Jesus searches the hearts and the minds of every person. In this, He seeks out those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. He will find good people in bad churches and bad people in good churches. He will weed out the bad and gather the good unto Himself.

Isaiah speaks of the state of the sinner before God, calling out for each to come to Him through Christ and be purified from their unrighteousness –

> "'Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the LORD, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.'" Isaiah 1:18

Lord God, may we trust in nothing less than the perfection of Jesus Christ and in His righteousness alone. In Him alone can we be cleansed, and so let us never put our hope in our own works. The things we do are already tainted with sin. How could that be pleasing to You? But by faith in what Jesus has done, we can stand before You pure and clean. Thank You for the perfect righteousness of Christ – granted by faith alone. Thank You for our Lord Jesus. Amen.

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. Revelation 3:5

Jesus now explicitly states what He inferred in the previous verse. There, He said, "and they shall walk with me in white." He now says, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments." This is now the fifth promised blessing to those who overcome. Again, to understand what it means to "overcome," and how that comes about, refer to the comments on verse 2:7 (and a fuller explanation in 2:26). In short, it is to accept the premise that Jesus is the Son of God and to receive Him as such by faith.

Those who so overcome "shall be clothed in white garments." It is a sign of absolute sinless purity, and thus, it is the imputed righteousness of Christ. In this verse, we see a hint of how Christ was portrayed in the gospels while on the Mount of Transfiguration –

> "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. **3** His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them." Mark 9:2

Matthew says, "His clothes became as white as the light" (Matthew 17:2), and Luke says, "His robe *became* white *and* glistening" (Luke 9:29). As we will be like Him (1 John 3:2), it can be inferred that the white promised now in Revelation will be such as this. It will be so white that nothing we now know will compare to it.

Next, Jesus says, "and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life." The Greek reads, "the Book of the Life." This is a note of absolute assurance of eternal salvation. To overcome occurs through faith in Christ. When one overcomes, he has overcome. Jesus says that he who overcomes will not have his name blotted out of the Book of the Life.

Such a person has passed from death to life. He is, at that time, given a guarantee of that fact, the sealing of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1:13, 14). Nothing will ever change this once it occurs, because it comes from God who does not make mistakes, who sees the end from the beginning, and who will neither be deceitful nor lie. As Albert Barnes says –

"The expression 'I will not blot out' means, that the names would be found there on the great day of final account, and would be found there forever. It may be remarked, that as no one can have access to that book but he who keeps it, there is the most positive assurance that it will never be done, and the salvation of the redeemed will be, therefore, secure."

To ensure that this doctrine, that of eternal salvation or "once saved always saved," is understood, Jesus continues with, "but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." This takes us back to the thoughts found in Matthew and Luke –

> "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. **33** But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." Matthew 10:32, 33

> "Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. **9** But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God." Luke 12:8, 9

Jesus, speaking to Israel under the law, noted that the promises found in Him extended beyond the law to become general precepts in the time when He had fulfilled and set aside the law. He now confirms in Revelation that His words spoken then now carry the full force of what He had proclaimed. As Trench states –

"We may observe of this epistle that in great part it is woven together of sayings which the Lord had already uttered in the days during which he pitched his tent among men; he is now setting his seal from heaven upon his words uttered on earth."

In confessing the names of those who have overcome, Jesus is saying that He is our Advocate (1 John 2:1) before the Father. His acknowledgment is that He took the penalty we deserved and He has granted us His righteousness. He has further granted us eternal life (John 5:26-28). In His acceptance, the Father likewise receives us as His adopted children. This confession before the angels of God means that they will stand down from executing the sentence upon those who would otherwise be cast into the Lake of Fire.

Those who overcome are forever secure from further judgment concerning condemnation. Believers must go to the Bema Seat of Christ for a judgment of rewards and losses, but this will not be a judgment of salvation or condemnation.

Life application: Later we will read this in Revelation 19:8 – "And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." This is a less fortunate translation than versions that say, "righteousness of the saints." What is being bestowed upon the saints is not a garment of white because of anything we have done. Rather it is bestowed upon us by faith in the work of Jesus Christ alone.

It is His righteousness that is imputed to us. There is nothing we can do to either merit God's favor or to add to the work of Jesus Christ. The white garment then is a gift to the person who has, by faith alone, called on Christ as Lord.

The second honor is that He "will not blot out his name from the Book of Life." This means that all people on earth are *potentially* in the Book of Life, but not all are *actually* there. This is the same as all people being *potentially* forgiven in Christ, but not all are *actually* forgiven.

It is rather unfortunate that people, when speaking of forgiveness, say that others "must forgive everyone who offends them." This is not the biblical standard. Offering forgiveness and actually granting it are two different things.

God, through Jesus Christ, offers forgiveness to all, but not all are actually forgiven. To state otherwise is the heresy of universal salvation. To be saved, one must call on Jesus Christ and on Jesus Christ alone. There is no other way to the Father except through Jesus Christ. When a person does this, He promises that He will confess his name before His Father and before His angels. What an honor to those who believe! Jesus will openly acknowledge them to the Heavenly Host! Hallelujah and Amen!

Lord God, give us the desire, the ability, and the wisdom to step out and proclaim the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of the world now, before the time comes when it will be no longer possible. Help us to make the best use of our time for Your name. We know there is a final destiny we all must face – either in heaven or in the Lake of Fire. It is certain that only through Christ will we be found worthy of being in Your presence. Amen.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."' Revelation 3:6

As in the concluding words of the Lord to those in Thyatira (verse 2:29), these words here, and for the final two churches (Philadelphia and Laodicea), come at the very end of the epistle. However, this statement also preceded the note to those who overcome in the letter to the first three churches.

Regardless of the location, the words beg the reader to stop and consider what has been said. In the case of the letter to Sardis, theirs was a dead church, little was left of value and the Lord encouraged them to strengthen those things. His call is for the church to remember and repent, or he will come upon them as a thief.

The good news, at least for some, was that there were a few people left in the church who held fast to Christ. Of them, a note of the surety of their salvation was provided. He then noted to the whole church that any of them could join those few worthy souls by overcoming. This is the state of things in Sardis, and it is the state of many churches today. They are dead and their end is near if they don't repent. But even in those bad churches, there may be people who truly love Christ Jesus.

Life application: Although we all have ears, we all don't always listen. Having a physical attribute is no guarantee that it will be used. If you have ever done something unusual for the first time, for example, water skiing, you will find that the muscles you don't normally use will hurt the next day. If you're not used to studying, when you attend a college class for the first time, your brain will feel overloaded. If you are not normally a public speaker and you are asked to give a presentation, you very well may have a sore throat the next day. All of this occurs because you are using a part of you that is not normally exercised.

In the same way, when we don't pay heed to spiritual things, we get dry, cold, and lethargic in our spiritual lives. Jesus asks us to wake up from this spiritual condition, open the spiritual ears of our souls, and "hear what the Spirit says."

How many times have you picked up the Bible, read a passage, and put the Bible back down without it changing you at all? The words went into your eyes, passed right around your brain, and disappeared into the ether. Unless we combine the reading experience with the mental and spiritual process of thinking through what is being said, we miss the most valuable part of our interaction with God, His word, and the influence of the Holy Spirit.

When you read the Bible, take a moment to pray and ask God to open the eyes of your heart to a deeper understanding of what He is presenting. Hear what "the Spirit says to the churches." The words are not only for the individual church being addressed, but for

all people throughout the Church Age and in every denomination. Every heart should be open to what God is relating through the pages of the Holy Bible.

Yes, Lord! Open our hearts and give us minds of wisdom to understand the spiritual applications that are being presented in the Bible. If this is truly Your word, and it surely is, then it has the power to change us, to mold us, and to direct us in wonderful ways that will bring glory to You. And therefore, may it be so. Amen.

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,
'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens": Revelation 3:7

Jesus now addresses the sixth of the seven churches, beginning with, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write..." As has been noted, the "angel" is certainly referring to the leader of the church. Of the church in Philadelphia, Vincent's Word Studies states –

"Seventy-five miles southeast of Sardis. The second city in Lydia. The adjacent region was celebrated as a wine-growing district, and its coins bore the head of Bacchus and the figure of a Bacchante. The population included Jews, Jewish Christians, and converts from heathenism. It suffered from frequent earthquakes. Of all the seven churches it had the longest duration of prosperity as a Christian city. It still exists as a Turkish town under the name of Allah Shehr, City of God. The situation is picturesque, the town being built on four or five hills, and well supplied with trees, and the climate is healthful. One of the mosques is believed by the native Christians to have been the gathering-place of the church addressed in Revelation. 'One solitary pillar of high antiquity has been often noticed as reminding beholders of the words in Revelation 3:12 : "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God."'"

Philadelphia means "Place of Brotherly Love," and it was built by Attalus Philadelphus, the king of Pergamos. It is to the church that meets in this location that the Lord says, "These things says He who is holy." Here, the word is *hagios*, signifying "set apart," "holy," and "sacred." Three times, Christ Jesus is called the Holy One in Acts (Acts 2:27, 13:34, and 13:35). There it uses the word *hosios*. That signifies being holy by sanction. Christ is both holy by sanction and also set apart from sin and from that which is evil. This then corresponds to "the Holy One of Israel," meaning the Lord of the Old Testament. Christ is the embodiment of this holiness.

Next, He says, “He who is true.” Here, the word is *aléthinos* – that which is made of truth. It signifies real, or genuine. It is prefixed by an article in the Greek – “The True.” Christ is the embodiment of truth. Of this word, Vincent’s Word Studies notes –

“Αληθινὸς is not merely, genuine as contrasted with the absolutely false, but as contrasted with that which is only subordinately or typically true. It expresses the perfect realization of an idea as contrasted with its partial realization. Thus, Moses gave bread, but the Father giveth the true bread (τὸν ἄρτον τὸν ἀληθινόν). Israel was a vine of God's planting (Psalm 80:8), Christ is the true (ἡ ἀληθινὴ) vine (John 15:1). The word is so characteristic of John that, while found only once in the Synoptic Gospels, once in a Pauline Epistle, and four times in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it occurs nine times in the fourth Gospel, four times in John's First Epistle, and ten times in Revelation, and in every instance in these three latter books in its own distinctive signification.”

Next, the Lord says, “He who has the key of David.” This refers to the type given in Isaiah 22, Eliakim –

> “Then it shall be in that day,
> That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah;
> **21** I will clothe him with your robe
> And strengthen him with your belt;
> I will commit your responsibility into his hand.
> He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem
> And to the house of Judah.
> **22** The key of the house of David
> I will lay on his shoulder;
> So he shall open, and no one shall shut;
> And he shall shut, and no one shall open.
> **23** I will fasten him *as* a peg in a secure place,
> And he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house.” Isaiah 22:20-23

David is given in Scripture as typical of Christ, the ruling king. The house of David anticipates the kingdom of Christ. Eliakim was given promises that he would have authority over this office. Those things described of him by the Lord anticipated the greater fulfillment of them in the coming of Christ. What belonged to the throne and house of David would be managed by Eliakim during his temporary life. But those same things would be transferred to Christ for His eternal reign. Of this position, Jesus continues by saying, “He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.”

It is quoted from Isaiah 22:22 (above). The final authority of all matters over the everlasting kingdom of Christ belongs solely to Him. Anything He determines cannot be undone by another. That authority can be delegated, but the ultimate decision resides in Christ. For example, Christ said the following after Peter declared Jesus to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God" –

> "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. **18** And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. **19** And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'" Matthew 16:17-19

It was Peter who then opened doors and shut doors concerning spiritual matters especially as is recorded in the first chapters of Acts. A similar example of this from Paul's ministry is found in Acts as well –

> "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. **7** After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. **8** So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. **9** And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' **10** Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them." Acts 16:6-10

Paul also speaks of "a great and effective door" which was opened to him (1 Corinthians 16:9). In 2 Corinthians 2:12, he again mentions a door opened by the Lord for preaching the gospel. In Colossians 4:3, Paul asks the believers at Colossae to pray "that God would open to us a door for the word." As Christ claims authority to open such a door, and as that prayer was to be made to God, it is another purposeful clue to the fact that Jesus is God.

Life application: The church of Philadelphia receives only commendation. It is a sound and faithful church. Because of this and because of their "little strength" that will be mentioned in the coming verse, the letter is addressed from:

> "*He who is holy*" – The Holy One is a title ascribed to Yehovah in the Old Testament. Thus, Jesus is equated with God and is therefore capable of protecting and maintaining His church.

"*He who is true*" – Jesus is the embodiment of truth, and therefore His words are completely reliable, and the promises He will make to Philadelphia will come to pass.

"*He who has the key of David*" – Jesus is claiming that He is the ultimate fulfillment of the honors promised to the Messiah. He has all the authority of the kingship in His hand. Therefore, He is the One "*who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.*" In other words, His decisions are final, and all authority belongs to Him. If He accepts a person or a church, nothing can separate them from Him. If He rejects them, then the decision is final and the matter is settled for all eternity for them.

In the ultimate sense, Jesus has complete and sole authority over the door to either life or death for all humanity. Amazingly, He leaves the choice up to us as to which we will walk through. When the decision is made, it is sealed with His blood for salvation or for condemnation.

We choose Jesus! Lord God, be with us in our walk, and be with the churches we attend in our worship and pursuit of You. Help us to make right decisions, and to stand firm even in times of trial or persecution. We know that all power belongs to You, and so we have nothing to fear. Thank You for Your presence being with Your people. Amen!

"I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Revelation 3:8

Again, as with each church thus far, Jesus says to the church at Philadelphia, "I know your works." He is fully aware of all that goes on in any given church and at all times. Nothing misses His attention as He walks among the lampstands. Of this church, He continues with, "See, I have set before you an open door."

The Greek literally reads, "I have given before you a door opened." What this means is debated. It could be as noted in the previous verse what Paul relayed several times concerning a favorable opening to conduct evangelism. It could be that He has opened heaven to the church as a whole, meaning they are all of the true faith in Christ; none are excluded. Another explanation is that the Lord has opened the meaning of Scripture to them. The first seems the most likely. It is what Paul mentioned several times, and it is a primary purpose of the church.

As salvation is an individual matter, it seems unlikely that the Lord would refer to the church having an open door to salvation, even if all are saved. And Scripture is opened to those who read it, contemplate it, pray about it, and so on. It could even be that the open door is simply a way of saying that they will prosper in any and all of these ways. The church has found the Lord's favor, and He has opened His door of favor to them. Of this door, whatever the exact meaning is, Jesus says, "and no one can shut it."

As He said in the previous verse, He is "He who opens and no one shuts." Once the Lord has opened a door, for whatever reason, it will remain open as long as He determines it to be so. In the case of this open door, the Lord graciously opened it to them saying, "for you have a little strength."

This could be taken as "a little strength," or "little strength." If the former, it means that they may have a source of strength, even though it is weak. In this, the Lord assists them to complete the strength they need. Or, it could be that they are lacking any real strength at all, and the Lord has opened this door to them in their affliction. Either way, the Lord perceives a state of lack. He is either filling it up, or completely assisting them in accomplishing the task by opening this door for them. He further notes that they "have kept My word."

This is a point of obedience. Believers are saved by faith in Christ. But that salvation is to be worked out in obedience to the word. This is not a point of salvation, but one which shows a love for what is right, and it is a point upon which they will be rewarded. To keep the word of the Lord is consistently considered as pleasing to Him throughout Scripture. This church was faithful to what the Lord expects of His people.

To end the verse, Jesus adds in, "and have not denied My name." This is one of the highest notes of faithfulness to the Lord. When persecution comes, people may shut up about their faith, hide the fact that they follow Christ, and even deny His name at times. This is a part of the human condition – as is evidenced in Peter's denial of Him on the night before His crucifixion. For those who stand fast and are willing to acknowledge Him, even in such trying times, the Lord acknowledges it as that which is truly faithful.

The church at Philadelphia is commended by the Lord because what they have done is commendable. It is a note to all who wish to be pleasing to Him.

<u>Life application:</u> Jesus acknowledges that He is aware of the works of the church in Philadelphia. This, in turn, tells us that He is aware of the works of all churches – both good and bad. He is surveying the tasks and devotion of His people and is not simply a sideline quarterback.

Understanding this, let our actions be the epitome of faithfulness to Him. In this, He will certainly be pleased. Should we fail Him, He will remain faithful, because – as Paul says to Timothy –

> "If we are faithless,
> He remains faithful;
> He cannot deny Himself." 2 Timothy 2:13

Great and majestic are You, Lord God Almighty! When the world comes against us, You are there strengthening us and giving us the hope of eternal glory. We know that nothing in heaven or on earth can separate us from the love which You have lavished upon us through Christ Jesus our Lord. Thank You for Your sure and eternal promises! Hallelujah and Amen.

Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Revelation 3:9

In the previous verse, Jesus said, "See, I have set before you an open door." As noted then, that more literally said, "I have given before you a door opened." Now, using the same verb, He says, "Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan." In this, it more correctly says, "Indeed, I give out of the synagogue of Satan." The idea is being picked up again from the previous verse.

It is a way of saying, "I have given you an opened door, and I will give you those from the synagogue of Satan to acknowledge this fact." The Jews claim they have access through the door, but it is – in fact – believers in Christ who do. The opened door is, as noted in the previous verse, probably speaking of access to evangelism. The Lord opens opportunities to spread the gospel, and the gospel is what leads people to salvation. It is the opposite of what the Jews who rejected Christ did –

> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." Matthew 23:15

Indeed, instead of bringing their converts to the Messiah and heaven, they led them in the opposite direction to the Adversary (Satan) and to hell (Gehenna). Of them, Jesus next states, "who say they are Jews and are not, but lie." This is the same basic thought as Revelation 2:9 –

> "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan."

As noted at that time, this does not mean that they actively worship Satan, but that in having rejected Christ, the incarnate Lord (Yehovah), the Lord is not among them. Without Christ, they then – by default – belong to the devil. That is explicitly stated by Jesus in John 8:44 –

> "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources,* for he is a liar and the father of it."

This is why Jesus added on the words, "but lie." They say they are Jews, but they are not. Rather, they lie. Their words follow the words of their father, the devil. It is what Paul then refers to in Romans 2 –

> "For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; **29** but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God." Romans 2:28, 29

Paul's words are speaking only about people of Jewish descent, but who are either believers in Christ (and who are thus true Jews), or who are broken off from being true Jews. Jews may have the lineage, but those who do not come to Christ Jesus do not qualify for what that lineage was intended to bring about, meaning an internal circumcision of the heart. As noted in the commentary on 2:9, this does not mean that a Gentile becomes a Jew through faith in Christ. Gentiles remain Gentiles and are grafted into the commonwealth of Israel. To ensure proper theology, the categories must be maintained.

Of these non-converted Jews who are of the synagogue of Satan, Jesus next says, "indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet." The word translated as "worship" signifies to kiss the ground when prostrating oneself before a superior, and thus to worship. If Jesus is speaking of these people worshiping Him before the feet of those at Philadelphia, then the word "worship" is correct. However, if He is saying that the prostration is directed to those at Philadelphia, then the word "worship" is incorrect. Only God is to receive worship (see Revelation 22:9).

Either way, the words here are reflective of what it says in Isaiah –

> "Kings shall be your foster fathers,
> And their queens your nursing mothers;
> They shall bow down to you with *their* faces to the earth,
> And lick up the dust of your feet.
> Then you will know that I *am* the LORD,
> For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me." Isaiah 49:23

> "Also the sons of those who afflicted you
> Shall come bowing to you,
> And all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet;
> And they shall call you The City of the LORD,
> Zion of the Holy One of Israel." Isaiah 60:14

The very promises made to the people of Israel are given to those in the church – both Jew and Gentile. Jesus' words are inclusive of Jews who do not come to Jesus, but who instead persecute those in the church. Understanding this, Jesus finishes with, "and to know that I have loved you."

Again, the promises of the Lord's faithful love to Israel are transferred to those in the church – both Jew and Gentile. Being a Jew through natural descent does not ensure that the individual will be loved by the Lord. Rather, only those who come to the Son will receive the favor stated here by Jesus.

However, this does not exclude the Lord's love for national Israel. This is the point of Paul's words of Romans 9 through 11. Despite unbelieving Jews being cut off from the promises of God, the nation as a whole will never be cut off. Again, to ensure proper theology, the categories must be maintained.

<u>Life application:</u> God is working through history and every promise of the Bible will be fulfilled. The words of the Old Testament, promising that the Gentiles will come bow before Israel (as cited in Isaiah above), will come to pass, but it will only happen *after* Israel, as a nation, has fallen down in worship of Jesus in the presence of the church.

The time of the Tribulation is coming when the world will align itself against Israel. When all hope seems lost, there will be a conversion of heart and mind in the nation of Israel, and they will call on Jesus as Lord, acknowledging their previous rejection in remorseful repentance (Zechariah 12). When this happens, Jesus will return to the land and set up His millennial kingdom.

None of this is fantasy, but rather it is the reality of what will surely occur. For the church now, we can know that Jesus has loved us and will continue to do so. We are secure in our faith in Jesus Christ. In the end, all will come and worship before Him. No person, even those who have rejected Him, will be exempt. The dividing line for all humanity now is faith in Christ. Some bow willingly now, some will bow later in remorse, but all will come to acknowledge the truth of God in Christ –

> "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, **11** and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
>
> -Philippians 2:9-11

Lord, Your plan for the ages, and for the people of the world, is simply astonishing. You have bound all under disobedience that You may have mercy on all. By simply acknowledging You as Lord and believing in our hearts that God raised You from the dead, we are saved. What an amazing demonstration of Your wisdom and kindness! Amen.

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.
Revelation 3:10

In verse 3:8, Jesus spoke of an open door set before those at Philadelphia. He then noted that they had kept His word and they did not deny His name. In verse 3:9, He then contrasted them to the "synagogue of Satan" – meaning the unbelieving Jews – stating that He loved His faithful believers. With those points in mind, the Lord now says, "Because you have kept My command to persevere."

The Greek more precisely reads, "the word *of* the endurance *of* Me." This doesn't mean the words He spoke concerning patience, "but the word of Christ which requires patience to keep it" (Vincent's Word Studies). This was seen in verse 1:9 when speaking of "the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." The believers at Philadelphia were patient and did not deny His name, having endured through their various trials. Because of this, Jesus next makes a promise saying, "I also will keep you from the hour of trial."

The Greek word translated as "from" is *ek*. In its simplest form, it signifies "out of." It is a word that suggests "from the interior outwards," and thus "out from within." Thus, there is the thought of both "out from" and "to." When one is kept out from something,

they are kept “to” something else. For example, in Matthew 2:15, it says, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

If one is called “out of” Egypt, it signifies that the calling is “to” somewhere else. Therefore, Jesus is saying that He will keep those of Philadelphia “out of the hour of trial.” The implication is that they will not experience (be kept from, but through) the hour of trial, but will be removed (out of/from) the hour of trial. This trial is next described as “which shall come upon the whole world.”

If the trial is coming upon the whole world, and if these believers are to remain in the world, it doesn’t matter how safe they are kept, they will experience the trial to some extent. The entire world is a closed system. Jesus is clearly stating that they will not merely be kept “through” as Noah was on the ark, but “out of” as Enoch was. Noah may have been kept from the deluge, but he still indirectly experienced the effects of the deluge. Enoch was kept from the deluge, and he did not experience any of it.

Understanding this, and as the church of Philadelphia is representative of faithful believers who have kept the Lord’s command to endure, the logical conclusion is that those believers who are alive and have endured right up until the coming hour of trial upon the whole world will be taken out of/from what will then come upon the whole world. How this will occur may be debated, but the fact that the Lord has promised it will occur means that it will be so.

One can see the promise laid out – “have kept my word” (3:8) ... “I also will keep you from” (3:10). This then explains the next words which finish the verse, “to test those who dwell on the earth.” A testing of the entire inhabited world (oikoumenēs) will come upon those who dwell on the physical earth (gēs). One can make the logical assumption that if Christ is speaking to faithful believers who have kept His word to persevere, that the test is upon those who have not kept His word to persevere.

As the Lord specifically inserted the thought concerning the “synagogue of Satan,” meaning Jews who are not true Jews, between 3:8 and 3:10, it refers to a time when they will be tested – along with the rest of the world – for a set purpose. That set purpose is revealed in Daniel 9 (and elsewhere) –

> “Seventy weeks are determined
> For your people and for your holy city,
> To finish the transgression,
> To make an end of sins,
> To make reconciliation for iniquity,

To bring in everlasting righteousness,
To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to anoint the Most Holy." Daniel 9:24

Sixty-nine of these seventy weeks have been fulfilled. One more week, or seven-year period, lies ahead. It is this period that is being referred to as "the hour of trial." As a note concerning the word "hour," the word can mean a literal "hour," but it can also speak of a period of any given time. It is the same as in English when we may say of the day of a wedding, "Today is the hour of her joy."

It is this latter meaning that is being referred to here. To attempt to calculate the "hour" in relation to a twenty-four-hour day, and then to attempt to pinpoint either the rapture, the second coming, or some other particular marker based on this word is not a sound approach to biblical interpretation and it is without any basis in reality.

Life application: Though the words of this verse are written to a single church of seven churches, the words are – like all of the other verses of these seven letters – directed to the church as a whole at any given time during the church age.

Therefore, the "hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world" is certainly referring to the Tribulation period of the book of Revelation. To come to any other conclusion is to deny the entire premise of the book. It demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the timeline given in Daniel 9:24-27. A 490-year period was promised to the nation of Israel in those verses, and they are supported by dozens of other passages in the Old Testament which point to this period; they are directed at Israel.

In this timeline, 483 years have come to pass, leaving 7 years to be fulfilled. These 7 years are the contents of the book of Revelation, beginning with verse 4:2 and continuing until Christ's physical return in chapter 19. Jesus' comments about the end times in the gospels, such as Matthew 24, are also speaking of this time and His words are directed to Israel, not the church. The church was still a "mystery" yet to be revealed when Jesus made these comments. They are, therefore, directed to Israel. However, the promise in this verse is made to the church (to whom the seven letters are addressed). Therefore, when Jesus promises He will "keep you from the hour of trial" He means the church.

There are two views on what Jesus means. The first is that He will keep the church *in*, but carry it *through*, the tribulation period. The second is that He will take the church out of the world through the rapture. The second option is correct. Nothing else would

make literal sense of the other passages in the New Testament which speak of the rapture. It also fills the Old Testament typology where Lot was taken out of Sodom before the destruction took place. It makes no sense to say that Israel would be kept *in*, but carried *through*, the tribulation and then to repeat the same promise to the church.

The rapture will happen, and it will be *before* the tribulation period of the book of Revelation. Get your timeline straight, don't mix dispensations, and have faith in the plain, clear, and obvious sense of passages which may seem incredible, but which are given to us to be taken in a literal sense. The rapture is the blessed hope of the Christian – and it will happen just as promised.

To see pictures of the event known as the rapture from the Old Testament, this sermon from the Superior Word is well worth viewing- "*The Rapture - Old Testament Types and Shadows*." You can watch on YouTube or Sermon Audio.

What a gloriously wonderful promise, Lord Jesus! That you would come for us in the twinkling of an eye and carry us home to be with You is the most precious thought we can carry with us each day. Thank You for Your sure word, Your solid promises, and the security of knowing that we shall live eternally with You in glory. Hallelujah and whooo hooo! Amen.

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. Revelation 3:11

Jesus, as He has previously stated, poignantly remarks, "Behold, I am coming quickly." As before, the word translated as "quickly" signifies "without delay." That can mean "soon," or it can mean "suddenly." The Lord will come at the appropriate time, and when He comes, it will be sudden. Those who are not prepared for it will suffer the loss of what the visit anticipates. With that in mind, He next says, "Hold fast what you have."

This is referring to what was just said in verses 8 and 10. They have kept His word, they have not denied His name, and they have kept His command to persevere. They are to hold fast to such things and remain steadfast as a church. The reason for this is so "that no one may take your crown."

In verse 2:10, Jesus said, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." Whether the reference in this verse is to the crown of life (see also James 1:12) or not remains unstated. Elsewhere, Paul speaks of a crown of righteousness, a crown of rejoicing, and an imperishable crown. Peter speaks of a crown of glory that does not fade away. Because the crown's purpose here is undefined, it can be assumed that Jesus

is speaking in a general way about an honor that is conveyed, and yet one which may be lost.

How this would be lost is probably defined in Colossians 2:18, 19 –

> "Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, **19** and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God."

In other words, this is not saying that the crown would transfer from one person to another. Rather, it means that the crown is stolen away from the one to whom it was anticipated would receive it. It is not a crown that is already possessed, but rather a crown which could be possessed if the person remained faithful.

As Jesus' words in this verse are in the second person singular, He is talking to the church as a whole. Thus, this is not speaking of individual loss of salvation. Rather, it is referring to a loss of what could be obtained by any given member of the church. This is certain based on the note of those who overcome presented in the next verse.

Life application: The church in Philadelphia had "a little strength," but they still held fast to the truth of the gospel and the message of Jesus Christ. In this verse, Jesus says, "I am coming quickly." We as Christians are not to miss this fact.

A haphazard attitude toward our faith will only result in sadness. When the Lord returns for the church, it will be in the "twinkling of an eye." Whether you believe this or not, or whether you accept the premise of the rapture or not, it is what the Bible teaches. We all have our warning and none of us can say we just didn't know, or we needed a little bit more time.

The areas of the Bible we struggle with are no excuse for being lax in what we do understand. Therefore, Jesus asks us to "hold fast" to what we have. The areas that we are performing well in are areas we need to shore up for the long haul because we don't know the day of the Lord's return. If we do hold fast, we can be sure that no one will take our anticipated crown.

Whatever is promised to all can be obtained by each. When it is obtained, it belongs to that person forever. However, for those who fail to receive it, that anticipated crown will be taken from him.

Lord Jesus, of all the things we look forward to in our walk, nothing is more precious than knowing that You came to restore us to life and that You are coming again to grant that life. We love the thought of Your appearing and it is the joy that carries us through this world of trials and grief. We simply can't wait to be in Your presence! Amen.

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name. Revelation 3:12

The Lord, still speaking to the church at Philadelphia, now relays the honors to be anticipated for the one who overcomes. As He says, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God."

As previously noted, to "overcome" is to believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ. When one is saved through belief in this good news, he has overcome. The Greek, as before, is a present participle – the overcoming. It is a continuous process until the end of the church age. Whoever overcomes is included in the promise. Such a person then will become a fixed and immovable part of the building that God is erecting.

This edifice is referred to by both Paul and Peter with various other terminology –

> "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner*stone,* **21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, **22** in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

> "Coming to Him *as to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, **5** you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2:4, 5

Such terminology is used of both Jew and Gentile, again demonstrating the lunacy of the doctrine of hyperdispensationalism which speaks of two gospels – one for the Jew and one for the Gentile. The promises to both are united in Christ.

Jesus' promise here of being made a pillar speaks of permanency and that which is immovable. This is seen in both testaments. When the Lord spoke to Jeremiah, He said–

"For behold, I have made you this day
A fortified city and an iron pillar,
And bronze walls against the whole land—
Against the kings of Judah,
Against its princes,
Against its priests,
And against the people of the land." Jeremiah 1:18

Paul speaks of the apostles as being "pillars" in Galatians 2. Pillars uphold and establish a temple through their strength and support. Next, the Lord says, "and he shall go out no more." The Greek is emphatic, reading more precisely, "and out no not shall he go anymore."

To the one who has overcome the Lord gives this promise that he has, in fact, overcome. In other words, the deal is done. This is a note, once again, of eternal salvation. In overcoming, he is made a pillar, and he is forever secure within the edifice God is erecting. Again, the act of overcoming for the individual is in this life. It is based on belief in Christ, and its effects are eternal. Of this, Jesus says, "I will write on him the name of My God."

What this is referring to is debated. However, the "name of My God" is certainly the divine name of the Lord – YHVH. This was the inscription placed upon the one who was high priest in Israel as is recorded in Exodus –

"You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, *like* the engraving of a signet:

HOLINESS TO THE LORD.

37 And you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban; it shall be on the front of the turban. **38** So it shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD." Exodus 28:36-38

Having the name of God written upon someone signifies ownership, rule, authority, and so on. Adam was given the right to name the animals, signifying that he had authority over them. When the city of Rabah was about to be taken, Joab called for David to come and complete the battle –

[26]"Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the people of Ammon, and took the royal city. **27** And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, 'I have fought against Rabbah, and I have taken the city's water *supply.* **28** Now therefore, gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called after my name.' **29** So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah, fought against it, and took it." 2 Samuel 12:26-29

Those who overcome will be called after the name of Yehovah. They will be forever under his ownership and rule. Next, Jesus says, "and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem." Just as Rabbah was to be named after David because David prevailed in the battle, so those who are the Lord's will be named after the city of the Lord, being recognized as belonging to that city. This is reflected in the 87th Psalm –

"And of Zion it will be said,
'This *one* and that *one* were born in her;
And the Most High Himself shall establish her.'
6 The LORD will record,
When He registers the peoples:
'This *one* was born there.' *Selah*" Psalm 87:5, 6

Those who overcome are born again of God. They are born into the city of God. And, they are named after that city and under His rule and authority. With this in mind, Jesus continues with, "which comes down out of heaven from My God."

The same idea is expressed in Revelation 21:2 and 21:10. The idea is that New Jerusalem is of heavenly origin. Its source is from God, and thus it is holy, pure, and undefiled. Those who enter it are likewise holy, pure, and undefiled because of the work of Jesus Christ. The corruptible state in which we exist will be changed to that which is incorruptible. In this, there will be a reuniting of man with God in a state which cannot exist at this time.

To show a contrast between the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem, in the book of John, the Greek form of the name is used, *Hierosoluma*. However, in Revelation, the form transliterated from the Hebrew is used, *Ierousalém*. Thus, John is making a noticeable distinction between the two.

Finally, the Lord speaks out one more promise in this verse, saying, "And *I will write on him* My new name." What this name is can only be speculated on. In Revelation 19, it says –

> "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. **12** His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself." Revelation 19:11, 12

The name "Jesus," or *Yeshua*, means "Salvation." That is derived from Yehoshua (Joshua), meaning Yah (short for Yehovah) Saves. This is what Christ came to do. He came to save His people. The new name will reflect something of the nature of Christ that will be understood by His people when it is inscribed upon them.

In this, there is a threefold naming of the one who overcomes: 1) The name of God, 2) the name of the New Jerusalem, and 3) the new name of the Lord. Thus, there is the total possession of the person by God – complete and full restoration of what was lost in the fall. There is granted eternal citizenship in the city of God. And, there is the connection to the eternal glory of Christ in a relationship that is not yet comprehended by the people of God.

Life application: The word for "temple" in this verse is the word *naos*. Elsewhere, it refers to the temple in Jerusalem, but specifically to the sanctuary itself. Jesus equates this temple with Himself in John 2:21. Then in Paul's writings, he says that when we call on Jesus, we become such a temple. This is because the Holy Spirit resides in us. Paul then says that the members of the church are being built into a temple of the Lord. All of this shows the progression of what has been and what will be.

This verse is telling us of the great glory to come which will be bestowed on the believer. We will eternally be in the very presence of God, in the Most Holy Place. It will be a permanent state, but it is one already realized in God's mind because of our acceptance of what Christ has done for us.

This is clearly reflected in the words of Paul –

> "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him,* that we may also be glorified together."
>
> -Romans 8:16, 17

What God has done for us in Christ is a done deal when we believe. Don't let anyone rob your joy by saying you can lose your salvation. If this were true, your salvation would be up to you, not to the Lord. Think clearly, be reasonable, and have assurance that God saved you and continues to save you, despite your failings.

Lord, the honors which You have promised to Your faithful are grander and more glorious than we can imagine. We are undeserving of Your honor and only deserving of Your wrath, but You promise to crown us with eternal riches and glory. How can we but praise You! Amen.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 3:13

Again, as with the previous churches, the Lord calls out for those of the church (and thus all who will hear during the church age) to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches." But in order to hear, they must have an ear, meaning an ear willing to listen. Like the fourth and fifth churches, this call comes at the very end of this letter to Philadelphia.

Nothing negative was conveyed to those at Philadelphia, and great promises were given to them. This was highlighted in the words, "I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." Great spiritual blessings are promised to those who overcome as well, just like all of the churches.

The Lord is perfectly fair in His dealings with all people - in how He metes out punishment and in how He hands out rewards.

Life application: This is the sixth of seven times that the Lord repeats this advice – "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Hearing, in these cases, implies more than just sound going into the ear and causing the little ear-bones to resonate. It implies understanding leading to faith and faith leading to obedience. Hearing without acting upon Jesus' words would be no different than smelling a gas leak in the house and lighting up a burner on the stove anyway. When the stove is lit, you will find yourself making an unanticipated and forced exit through the kitchen window and out of the house.

In the same way, there are people in the seven churches, and in all churches since, who have heard the words of the Bible that were given through the Spirit, but who will find themselves unexpectedly, and against their will, tossed into "outer darkness" where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The question for each of us as we read these verses is, "Have I read and thought through the admonition given to these churches?"

Are you in a church that condones homosexuality, even from the pulpit? Are you in a church that is doing "good stuff" for people without giving Jesus the credit? Are you in a

church that has idols that people service in one way or another? These things have been addressed in the first six letters and Jesus does not tolerate them.

It is time to really evaluate where we stand and take to heart what the Spirit is saying. We have one more letter to go, and then we will be off of the subject of the state of the churches. When Jesus returns, if you haven't taken to heart what has been relayed to you, then why should He return for you? He is coming, and when He does, may He find each of us ready for that unexpected and sudden moment.

O God, turn our hearts to the voice of Your Spirit as it speaks to us through Your word. Help us to be attentive to what is said, and to be obedient to the words we have been given. May we faithfully act upon them. May You receive the glory You are due as we live our lives in Your presence each moment. To Your praise and honor we pray. Amen.

"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,
'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: Revelation 3:14

We now come to the final letter addressed to the seven churches. As with all of the other letters, it is addressed "to the angel of the church." This speaks of the leader of the church, not an angelic being. He is the leader (angel) "of the church of the Laodiceans."

The name Laodicea comes from two separate Greek words, *laos* which is a gathering of people, normally of the same stock and language, and *dike* (pronounced deekay) which is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as "judgment," "vengeance," and "punish." It is associated with a judicial hearing or decision which especially contains a sentence of condemnation. What a fitting name for the words which will come from the Risen Lord.

Of this location, Laodicea, Charles Ellicott gives us the following insights –

(14) Laodicea.—Situated half way between Philadelphia and Colossae, and not far from Hierapolis. It received its name from Laodice, wife of Antiochus the second king of Syria, by whom it was rebuilt and beautified. It had borne in earlier times the names of Diospolis and afterwards Rhoas. It shared with Thyatira and Sardis in the dye trade; the woods grown in the neighbourhood were famous for their quality and the rich blackness of their colour. Prosperity in trade had so enriched the population that when their city suffered in the great earthquake (A.D. 60) they were able to carry on the work of rebuilding without applying, as many of the neighbouring towns were compelled to do,

to the Imperial Treasury for aid. The language of St. Paul (Colossians 1:5-8) suggests that the churches of Colossae and the neighbourhood first received Christianity from the preaching of Epaphras, though it seems strange that so important a city, lying hard upon the great Roman road from Ephesus to the east, should have been passed over by St. Paul in his journeyings throughout Phrygia (see Acts 16:6; Acts 18:23); yet, on the other hand, Phrygia was a vague term, and the language of Colossians 2:1 is most generally understood to imply that the Apostle had never personally visited either Colossae or Laodicea. (... Colossians 2:1.) But it was a Church in which St. Paul took the deepest possible interest; the believers there were constantly in his mind. He knew their special temptations to the worship of inferior mediators, and to spiritual paralysis springing from wordly prosperity and intellectual pride. He had great heart-conflict for those of Laodicea (Colossians 3:1), and in proof of his earnest solicitude he addressed a letter to them (Colossians 4:16), in all probability the epistle we call the Epistle to the Ephesians. From the Epistle to the Colossians we may gather that when St. Paul wrote the Christians at Laodicea assembled for worship in the house of Nymphas (Colossians 4:15) probably under the presidency of Archippus (Revelation 3:17).

It is to this church in Laodicea that John is instructed to "write." Jesus' words are spoken to John in his vision, and he is to then transmit the Lord's words to the church, saying, "These things says the Amen." This is a title only here ascribed to Jesus as a proper name. However, it is another confirmation that He is Yehovah incarnate.

The phrase is taken from Isaiah 65:16 which twice says concerning Yehovah, *b'elohe amen*, or "in *the* God *of* Amen." Of this, Vincent's Word Studies rightly notes, "The term applied to the Lord signifies that He Himself is the fulfillment of all that God has spoken to the churches." The term not only speaks of what Christ says, but of who He is. He is the embodiment of the truth, and, therefore, everything He speaks is the truth. In this, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown then reconfirms the deity of Christ by saying –

"The saints used Amen at the end of prayer, or in assenting to the word of God; but none, save the Son of God, ever said, 'Amen, I say unto you,' for it is the language peculiar to God, who avers by Himself. The New Testament formula, 'Amen. I say unto you,' is equivalent to the Old Testament formula, 'as I live, saith Jehovah.'"

This title, the Amen, is given now to contrast the character of those in Laodicea where it will say, "that you are neither cold nor hot." The Amen is firm, fixed, and unwavering. But to be neither hot nor cold is vacillating at best, and totally uncommitted in any important way at all.

To bolster this marvelous title, the Amen, the Lord next says, "the Faithful and True Witness." The term ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, or "the Witness the Faithful," is repeated from verse 1:5. To this is added καὶ ὁ ἀληθινός, or "and the True." Being the Faithful Witness refers to Christ's testimony, but especially his death. The word *martus*, or "witness," is where our word "martyr" comes from. When standing before Pilate, Jesus said –

> "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." John 18:37

John understood that Christ's life, even to the point of death, was a witness to God's plan of redemption that had been promised since the very fall of man. Christ Jesus faithfully accomplished His work. In doing so, and without sinning during the process, He became the firstborn from the dead as noted in verse 1:5. Along with this, the term "the True" isn't referring to the speaking out of truth. Rather, it conveys the sense of true as a witness. Everything that embodies Christ as a witness is the absolute truth of God.

Finally, in this verse, Jesus says He is "the Beginning of the creation of God." The word is *archē*. It does not indicate being a part of creation, but rather He is the Beginner of the creation. He is not a caused part of creation, but rather the principality behind the creative effort. He is thus the Lord over creation. This is seen, for example, in John 1:1-3. In Colossians 1:15, He is called the *prōtotokos*, or "firstborn," over all of creation. It is He who possesses life which is self-existent, meaning without dependency on anything else.

<u>Life application:</u> Laodicea is mentioned last and it certainly fits the state of many churches in the world today, just as it has been true at other points in church history as well. As such, it is fitting that we should take the words from the Lord to heart and carefully contemplate what is being said. There are no words of commendation given in this letter. The church is wealthy, arrogant, and dead in its own self-satisfaction.

As noted, "Amen" is a word spoken to indicate security, soundness, reliability, and complete assurance – all things which are lacking in this corrupt church. As the "Faithful and True Witness," He testifies to His own nature, needing nothing to be added to it.

In both testaments, the "testimony of two or three witnesses" establishes a matter. But Jesus testifies to Himself because He is the second member of the eternal Godhead; He is complete in and of Himself. His witness therefore testifies to His gospel upon which the faithful can peacefully rest. And His faithfulness means that He is true, and His word is true. They can be fully relied upon.

As He the First Cause of the creation, He is the sovereign Ruler of it. He is the Lord, Yehovah, revealed in His fullness. He was, and is, and ever will be. He is unchanging and immutable. He is the initiator of all things and He is the One who will bring all things to their satisfactory completion. In the Risen Lord, we serve the eternal and glorious manifestation of God. He is Jesus.

Oh Lord Jesus! The thought of You and Your greatness fills our souls with joy. We know that we can trust completely and wholeheartedly in You. You are ever faithful and ever true, and Your glory fills the earth as the waters cover the sea. Praises belong to You, now and forever! Amen.

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. Revelation 3:15

Here, the Lord is using an analogy of what would be completely understandable to the people in the church of Laodicea. From his commentary on the book of Revelation, Jack Kelly says the following –

"The church in Laodicea receives no commendation, only this criticism, rich in symbolic sarcasm. Laodicea got its water from nearby Heiropolis, a hot spring resort that still flourishes today, now called Pamukkale. The water came across the valley in an open aqueduct. Having begun its journey fresh from the hot springs, it was luke warm by the time it arrived. Too cool to be used for cleaning or bathing, and too warm to be refreshing, it was unfit for use until it could be either heated up or cooled down. The fire of the Spirit had gone from the Church in Laodicea leaving its members engaged in "form without substance" ritual. Not that they minded. They were happy as clams with their no commitment, no responsibility religion. So it is in much of the emergent church today. They look like a church and do some things that a church does, but you won't detect the power of the Holy Spirit there and the gospel of our salvation is only obvious by its absence. Even though their congregations are often large and well financed, their spiritual condition is one of poverty."

Understanding this typology, the Lord begins with, "I know your works." He again repeats what He has stated to all six of the previous churches. Like an attentive administrator in a company, or like the observant general among his troops, so is Christ among His churches. He walks among the lampstands and observes all that occurs among His people. In the case of Laodicea, He says, "that you are neither cold nor hot."

Like the lukewarm water that flowed into their city, they were not on fire for the Lord, nor were they completely dead to the things of religion as if living their lives like the

somnambulant masses. Instead, they were in a state of tepidity, unable to find footing in what is right concerning the faith, or what is wrong in a complete rejection of the faith. Because of this, the Lord next says, "I could wish you were cold or hot."

The words here, at first, seem contradictory to what one might expect. It is true that the Lord would want His people to be hot – on fire for Him and for the sharing of His gospel. But why would he wish they were cold? The answer is well explained by the scholar Alford –

"This as well as the opposite state of spiritual fervor, would be an intelligible and plainly-marked condition; at all events free from the danger of mixed motive and disregarded principle which belongs to the lukewarm state: inasmuch as a man in earnest, be he right or wrong, is ever a better man than one professing what he does not feel."

In other words, the Lord looks to judgment upon those who reject Him outright as less burdensome than pronouncing judgment upon those who claim to know Him and yet have no heart for Him. It gives the sense of, "If only they realized the horrors which await them, even they who claim to know Me." His remark then is not because the burden is greater upon Him, but because it is greater upon them. He could wish that it would not be so.

And the same is true with those who are, in fact, saved but who are only warm in their pursuit of Him. They (the saved but lukewarm) will stand before Him at the Bema Seat and expect great rewards because of their wealth and secure state in this life. And yet, they will find that they will receive nothing of honor or reward. It too will be burdensome upon them. Their hearts will surely say, "Oh! How I squandered my years that could have been spent reaching others for the cause of this glorious God before whom I now stand."

The word translated as "hot" is *zestos*. One can see the etymological root of the word zest in it. When something is zesty, it is spicy and even hot – such as with chili peppers added into a meal. In the case of the word *zestos*, it signifies "boiling hot," coming from the word *zeó*. It is an onomatopoetic expression where the sound of the word reflects what is happening. As water boils, it bubbles – *zeó*, *zeó*, *zeó*, or as we would say today, "bubble, bubble, bubble." The Lord would wish this for them.

The word translated as "cold" is *psuchros*. It is found only in Matthew 10:42 and then three times here in Revelation 3. In the use of Matthew 10, it is referring to the giving of a cup of cold water to a child. This would be to refresh him. Thus, the analogy by Alford (above) could be incorrect, and the Lord could be saying that He wishes the people were

refreshing to those around them. However, the word is ultimately derived from the verb *psuchó*, which is found only in Matthew 24:12. There, it speaks of the love of most growing cold. This may be the sense that is given by the Lord at this time. Being dogmatic on this, however, might not be the best case. Being cold, as in "refreshing," may be what is intended. Either way, the Lord finds the lukewarm state of Laodicea intolerable.

Life application: As noted above, Jesus starts His condemnation with a metaphor that they would be completely aware of. Two other cities were nearby to Laodicea. The first was Hierapolis, a city with hot springs that would have been a tourist attraction. They would use the water for health spas and in other relaxing ways. The other city was Colossae (also known as Barclay) which was renowned for its pure cool water. Archaeological finds show that there was an aqueduct that carried the water from the hot mineral springs to Laodicea which was about 5 miles away. By the time this water got there, it would have been tepid. It also would have been hard water.

As you can see, the picture here is that just as the water they had was blah and unpalatable, so were the people in the congregation. Hot water has its usefulness and cold does too, but the tepid water was comparatively disgusting. This is exactly how Jesus saw the church in Laodicea – disgusting.

This is a lesson and a warning to all of us. Jesus wishes for us to be either hot or cold. Those who are on fire for Him will receive a great reward and those who are cold will receive their just condemnation. On the other hand, those who are regenerated by the Spirit, but who are unwilling to act like it, are a hindrance to the cause of Christ. Their lives in Christ are wasted and there will be no reward for works. What a waste of the victory Jesus wrought on their behalf!

Lord, we often get lukewarm about our Christian lives and we know this is displeasing to You. Please rekindle the spark in our souls and bring us back to the place we should be…burning with the fire of the Spirit and bringing great honor and glory to You. We pray this so that You will be praised among the people that we interact with. Amen.

So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Revelation 3:16

The Lord just noted that the church at Laodicea was neither hot nor cold. With that in mind, He now says, "So then, because you are lukewarm." This is the only use of the Greek word *chliaros*, or lukewarm, in the Bible. It is exactingly translated. It is that which is tepid or lukewarm. In this, it is used figuratively to speak of the state of this church.

There is nothing either invigorating or refreshing about it; it is blah. With that noted, Jesus says, “and neither cold nor hot.”

Various manuscripts reverse the order, saying “hot nor cold,” but either way the point is made. There is nothing about them that is worthy of honorable mention. Instead, the church is in a state of existence that is devoid of any true life. Jesus will explain what this means, but before He does, He gives a very stern warning, saying, “I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

The translation is incorrect. It should say, “I am about to vomit you out of My mouth.” The word is *melló*, signifying something that is coming or about to happen. But more, the context shows that a chance for them to change and avert this happening (verse 3:19) is given. Thus, the violent action to be taken can yet be averted.

In His statement, another word unique in Scripture is given, *emeó*, or vomit. It literally signifies vomiting, but it figuratively speaks of utter rejection and a desire for total separation because of extreme disgust. The comparable Hebrew word, *qo*, is found several times in the Old Testament, such as in Leviticus 18, where the Lord says of the inhabitants of Canaan, “For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.”

Of this wretched state of Laodicea, John Gill says –

“I will spew thee out of my mouth; this shows how nauseous lukewarmness is to Christ, insomuch that on account of it he would not own and acknowledge her as his; but even cast her out, unchurch her, and have no more any such imperfect church state upon earth, as he afterwards never will, this is the last; nor is there any church state, or any remains of one in Laodicea; it is indeed quite uninhabited.”

Life application: What is it that makes you sick enough to vomit? Sometimes a certain smell can affect us enough to make us throw up. Sometimes people will get sick when they see something happen – maybe a car accident or they come upon something dead. Certainly, tasting something revolting will cause us to retch. These are all associated with our natural senses and this is the description Jesus uses for comparison – something lukewarm.

In our natural senses we have a strong distaste for what is lukewarm. But to Jesus, drawing from this comparison for our benefit, He tells us that a lukewarm state of spiritual life is what is revolting to Him. In order for something to be vomited out of one’s mouth, it must be in that mouth first.

Jesus is telling the church at Laodicea that if they don't change and return to a state of spiritual activity and vibrancy, He would no longer confess them as His people. Their status as "Christians" would be by name only, but they would have no affiliation with Christ in any meaningful sense. Therefore, to be spewed out of His mouth would mean that He would no longer even speak of them; they would be disavowed.

Just look around at denominations and churches today which once held to the Bible as the rule and guide of the faith. If they have been replaced with a catechism, a book of order, a book of discipline, or any other general guideline, then they may no longer be a group on fire for the Lord. Instead, they are on fire for themselves, setting up channels of self-satisfaction and personal theology.

Don't just rely on the words of the local church you belong to, but go online and check the overall doctrine of the denomination you are in. You may be appalled at what you see. If you are, how much more is Jesus? Don't get cut off from the prize because of your love for a church when it is a heart for the Lord that matters.

Lord, we certainly enjoy the fellowship of the congregation we attend, but help us to love You far more. Open our eyes to know whether You are pleased with where we worship. Should we be working to restore it to a spiritually alive state, or is it too far gone? Should we be looking for another church home? May we honor You first and foremost by being in a church that pursues You through Your word. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— Revelation 3:17

The Greek is very forceful in this verse. A more literal rendering would be –

> "because thou sayest -- I am rich, and have grown rich, and have need of nothing, and hast not known that thou art the wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." YLT

The word "you" (thou) is in the emphatic position. This highlights the arrogance of the attitude being professed – "Because YOU say." With that in mind, Jesus begins with, "Because you say, 'I am rich.'"

It is debated whether the word "rich" is speaking of worldly wealth or spiritual riches. However, the debate is really unnecessary. The reason for this is found right in Scripture. The most "super spiritual" of the people in Israel were the Pharisees. This is

made evident again and again in the gospels. But the gospel of Luke shows an important connection between their supposed spiritual wealth and their earthly state –

> "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. **15** And He said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.'" Luke 16:14, 15

And again, in all three synoptic gospels, this is recorded just after His discussion with a rich young ruler –

> And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! **25** For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." **26** And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" Luke 18:24-26

What can be inferred from these passages is the same thing that can be inferred from people's attitude today in churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and etc., all over the world, and what was surely the case in Laodicea as well. It is that people generally assume that because they have great wealth, God favors them. It is a fallacious category mistake, but it is an easy one to make. In our minds, we equate temporal blessings with divine favor.

Jesus clearly showed in both instances from the gospels that this is incorrect. He now reminds those at Laodicea that this is not so with His words here. Rather, they should pick up their copy of the gospels, read it, and take it to heart. And so, He continues with, "have become wealthy."

Here, the verb form of the adjective, translated as "rich," that was just used is given. Keeping the word consistently translated gives a better sense (as seen in the YLT referenced above) – "I am rich, and have grown rich." Thus, it seems to say, "I am rich (worldly wealth), and have grown rich (in divine favor)." Those of those at Laodicea have conflated the two in their minds, leading them to a very false sense of security. As James notes –

> "Come now, *you* rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon *you!* **2** Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. **3** Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. **4** Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept

> back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. **5** You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. **6** You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you." James 5:1-6

James, writing to those who feel secure in their wealth, reveals the spiritually poor state that they are really in. Further, he shows them that even their earthly wealth can disappear in a moment. In this, they are left with nothing but sorrow and anticipated judgment. For those at Laodicea, they had not taken such lessons to heart. Instead, in their smugness they said that they "have need of nothing."

The emphatic nature of the words continues by saying more literally, "and of nothing need I have." They were so filled up with their riches, or supposed riches, that they adamantly state they have no lack at all – Q: "What need do you have?" A: "Need? Of nothing am I in need. I have all I could ever need." Their words reflect the attitude of the rich fool spoken of by Jesus –

> 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. **17** And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' **18** So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. **19** And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry."' **20** But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' Luke 12:16-20

Like this rich fool, Jesus tells those at Laodicea that they are in dire shape. They have trusted in the wrong thing, and they must consider their state carefully. And so, He adamantly continues by saying, "and do not know that you are wretched." As seen above, the Greek has an article before "wretched." They are "the wretched." It is a way of emphasizing their state. Thus, it is not speaking of their consciousness of the state, but of the state itself. They don't even realize that they are the wretched, but they are. While they are looking at their bank accounts, Jesus is looking at a spiritually impoverished group of people that are on the wide path to destruction.

Next, He says, "miserable." The Greek reads, "and miserable" to highlight the new category. The word is found only elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 15:19. It signifies "to be pitied." While they were walking around showing off their fancy clothes, big carts with well-fed dual ox propulsion, and speaking of their latest vacation to the Mediterranean Sea, the angels of heaven were looking down on them in pity, knowing that what they

thought was of value was temporary, of no value, and was actually leading them away from the true treasures of the paradise of God.

Jesus next says they are "poor." Again, the Greek reads, "and poor." Here they trusted in their riches, and yet, Jesus shows that these things led them directly to a state of poverty. It was not divine favor that brought them worldly wealth, and so it was not divine favor that rested upon them because of their worldly wealth. What they thought led from one thing to another actually led in the opposite direction.

Again, the Lord continues with, "blind." And again, the Greek reads, "and blind." Their eyes were so focused on the worldly that their spiritual eyes were covered over, even to blindness. Contrariwise, this is probably a part of why Paul said these words to the Ephesians –

> "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, **16** do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: **17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, **18** the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."
>
> -Ephesians 1:15-18

The "eyes of your understanding" speaks of spiritual matters. Paul prayed that those he ministered to would have them opened and enlightened. Laodicea needed this in a giant way. The things they looked to only further closed their minds to the truth of their state.

Finally, Jesus says, "and naked." The words take the reader all the way back to the first account of man. In the Garden of Eden, our first parents disobeyed the word of the Lord and a realization came upon them –

> "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked." Genesis 3:7

They stood naked and exposed before their Creator. Since that time, all humanity has been born into the same condition. But our minds have become dull to the state we are in. We no longer realize the shame of our sin. Until that occurs, we cannot call out for a covering – the only covering – that can hide it, meaning the imputed righteousness of Christ. This is a theme that goes throughout Scripture. The garments provided by the Lord are the only things that can protect us from the coming judgment upon our naked

state. This is the condition of those at Laodicea, and the Lord poignantly warns them of this.

Life application: What was the root cause of the lukewarm state of the church at Laodicea? There are two major views on it. One view is that the people of the church were wealthy and prosperous, in money and possessions, and felt secure in their lives of comfort. If this is the case, then they can be equated with a large portion of believers in the wealthier nations of the world today. "Look how God has favored us! We have a big church and nice cars, money in the bank, and not a care in the world. We 'have need of nothing.'"

The other view is that the church felt they were spiritually prosperous and had a command of the things of God. This church then would have felt much more "spiritual" than those around them and that they were somehow better than the other congregations. "Look at our religion! It is pure and undefiled, and we are not like the rest of the sinners around us. We have dotted every 't' and crossed every 'i,' and no one can tell us the error of our ways."

Unfortunately, they missed the fact that "t's" need to be crossed and "i's" need to be dotted. They made the fundamental error of trusting in religion for the sake of religion. In this, they missed the point of true faith and worship.

As noted above, there is a third option, and one that is more than likely. The people at Laodicea fit both views. They had worldly wealth and also a superior attitude in their religious dealings. You see, the two go hand-in-hand quite well. The poor generally have a heart for the things of God, but as societies or groups become prosperous in material possessions, they also tend to solidify their religious lives in a way that exalts the mode of worship over the object of worship – which should always be the Lord Jesus.

How or where we worship is far less important than Who we worship. This doesn't mean that chaos should rule in our meetings, but it does mean that formal gatherings with no heart for the Lord leave us wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. We stand shameful, hopeless, worthless, confused, and exposed before the eyes of the One who observes our hearts and attitudes.

Lord Jesus, may our hearts not be stolen away from You by worthless material gain, nor by worship which is cold and lifeless. May we not cling to having showy presentations that then make our type of worship the very object of our worship. Rather, help us to use our hearts, breath, actions, and souls to glorify You alone. Amen.

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. Revelation 3:18

Jesus just said to those at Laodicea that they were "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." Now, to correct those deficiencies, He says, "I counsel you." This is the first of the ironic ideas that will issue forth from the Lord. The church was quoted by Jesus in the previous verse as having said that they were in "need of nothing." Jesus shows them that they were, in fact, in great need of His counsel.

Next, the Lord speaks more irony, saying, "to buy from Me." One must question how someone who is poor could make a purchase, much less the things Jesus will lay out. But the thought takes the reader of the Bible back to the words of Isaiah –

> "Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
> Come to the waters;
> And you who have no money,
> Come, buy and eat.
> Yes, come, buy wine and milk
> Without money and without price." Isaiah 55:1

Some things can be bought "without money and without price," meaning even someone who is "poor" could afford what is offered. But with what is such a purchase made? The Hebrew of Isaiah 55:1 is *b'lo keseph u-b'lo mekhir* – "in no silver and in no price." The implication is that what is to be bought cannot be bought with money or a hire. Rather, it requires "everything that one has." It takes the reader back to Matthew 13 –

> 44 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."
> 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." Matthew 13:44-46

There are some things that money cannot buy. Instead, they call for everything to be put forward. In this, Jesus is instructing those at Laodicea to put aside everything else and come to Him alone for salvation, not trusting in their own accomplishments, possessions, or goodness. He doesn't want their stuff; He wants them. In this, they will buy "gold refined in the fire."

The verb is a perfect participle, it is “gold having been refined ‘out of’ the fire.” The sense is that the gold is right out of the fire, shining and pure. It is free of any dross and imperfection. Jesus is equating a right relationship with Him in this. The purity of spiritual wealth is contrasted with the false wealth possessed by those at Laodicea. What they have is tainted and impure. What He offers is of the most precious quality. And, He says this offer to them is so “that you may be rich.”

They had claimed in the previous verse, “I am rich.” Jesus says it is otherwise. The cost of heaven is a coin of grace. Nothing else can pay the fee. But that grace must be received by faith, as Paul notes in Ephesians 2. They were trusting in self; Christ says, “Trust in Me.” He then tells them of something else they are to buy from Him saying, “and white garments.”

It has been noted that Laodicea was famous for rich black wool that was processed there. If true, it would make an ironic contrast to what has already been spoken of by Jesus to those at Sardis –

> “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. **5** He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments.” Revelation 3:4, 5

The garments offered by the Lord signify purity without any defilement. In other words, sinless perfection. Those at Laodicea, like all people, were sinners. Without the imputed righteousness of Christ, which comes by grace through faith, they could not enter into heaven and the presence of God. Christ offers them these white garments (as He says) so “that you may be clothed.”

The implication is that to Him, they were just like their first parents in the garden. He then says this explicitly with the words, “that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.” Without the imputed righteousness of Christ, the sin of man is all that God sees. But being clothed in Christ, God only sees the sinless perfection of His Son.

The symbolism is hinted at even just after the giving of the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel. Immediately after that, the Lord gave the instructions concerning the building of an earthen altar. There it said –

> “And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. **26** Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.” Exodus 20:25, 26

The symbolism of hewing stones, and of walking up steps, is that of works. It is self-based righteousness. In this, the "nakedness," meaning the sin of the offeror, would be exposed on the altar and the offering would be unacceptable. The sacrifice must be pure and undefiled, and no personal merit of the offeror could be included in the offering.

Jesus next says to those at Laodicea, "and anoint your eyes with eye salve." The word translated as "eye salve," *kollourion*, is found only here. It comes from a root signifying "to cling together," or "glue." Thus, it was a mixture held together as a small cake that was then applied to the eyes. One of the things Laodicea was famous for was the production of eye salve made from Phrygian powder mixed with oil. That is being used as an example of how to cure the blind state they were in. As Jesus says, "that you may see."

The words are reflective of what occurred in John 9. There, Jesus made a mixture and applied it to the eyes of a blind man. In this, the man was healed. In verse 9:38, the man professed belief in Christ and worshipped Him. After this, the narrative says –

> [39] And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."
> **[40]** Then *some* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?"
> **[41]** Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains. John 9:39-41

Those at Laodicea thought they could see all things clearly, but they were blind to who Christ truly is. Only by faith in Christ can the spiritual eyes be opened and discern spiritual things. As Paul says in Ephesians 1:18, "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

<u>Life application:</u> From time to time we need advice, and so we seek out a person we can trust – whether we know them personally or not. If we need financial advice, we will find a sound advisor for our money – "Mr. Kane, I'm facing bankruptcy…help!" If we need marital advice, we may talk to a pastor – "Pastor Bachman, my husband isn't caring enough. What do I do?" And if we have had psychological trauma, we may go to a world-renowned psychologist – "Dr. Collins, I'm struggling with the memory of my car accident from a year ago…I don't know what to do." In the case of all spiritual matters, the advice comes directly from the Author of our existence – Jesus.

We don't need to ask others for the answer to most spiritual matters because they are already given right in the pages of the Bible, including the cure for a spiritually lethargic or dead state. This verse in Revelation has been given to show those who are in that state how to correct it.

If you have trusted in your own deeds, your own wealth, your own righteousness, or anything else that stems from you for your salvation, you have placed your trust in the wrong place. Be freed of this attitude, take yourself out of the equation and come to Christ without any such thing. Give Him of yourself by giving Him your faith in His offering of grace. In this, you will be found pleasing to God.

Lord God, help us to take to heart the advice You have given us in Your word concerning how to be saved. It is not of ourselves, but solely through what You have done in the giving of Jesus. Help us to realize this, accept the offering by faith, and to be reconciled to You through the precious blood of Christ. And then, give us the opportunity and the desire to share this wonderful word of reconciliation with those we meet upon life's path. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.
Revelation 3:19

As noted in the commentary of verse 3:14, there is no commendation given to the church at Laodicea. But it would be incorrect that the Lord has nothing positive to say to them, as evidenced with the words, "As many as I love." This should actually be taken as a sharp note of censure for those who lump entire modern-day Laodicean-type churches into a cart and personally send them off to the manure pile.

In fact, the word "I" is in the emphatic position, "I – as many as I might love..." It "calls attention to the fidelity of Christ's love in comparison with the weak partiality seen in human love" (Vincent's Word Studies).

Jesus' love of those in these churches is based on the fact that they are in churches that bear His name. At some point, they came to the sad state in which they now exist, most assuredly by taking their eyes off of the true intent of the church, which is to proclaim the gospel, praise God through Jesus Christ, and to hold fast to the word of truth that He has been given.

Laodicea probably started out as a great church, but it got misdirected, smug, over-confident in what they possessed, and they eventually forgot what the purpose of the church was. Jesus' words to them are to correct these defects and to get them back on

track. His love for them is not in question. But His tolerance for their lack of love for Him, which has been replaced with a love for worldly ease, is called to the forefront with the words that He loves them, as proven by the words, "I rebuke and chasten."

This is exactly what He has been doing and continues to do. In this, the word rebuke, *elegchó*, is one of the purposes originally given for the coming of the Holy Spirit, translated as "convict" –

> "And when He has come, He will **convict** the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:" John 16:8

It is variously translated as convict, reprove, rebuke, convince, and so on. The Holy Spirit was given to do this. He does it as much through the word He has inspired as through any other means. It is one of the great purposes of the Bible. Those at Laodicea have forgotten even this, they had also forgotten any internal conviction of the Spirit, and they now require direct words from the Lord. But even those words are now included in Scripture – as a warning to all such churches that they also stand in jeopardy.

With the completion of Scripture, new warnings are no longer necessary. We must be faithful to proclaim the word as our final source of such reproving. To dismiss the word will only lead to sorely unhappy results.

The word translated as chasten, *paideuó*, speaks of the training of "a child under development with strict training." It is the word used in Hebrews 12:6 which was brought forth from an Old Testament passage Proverbs 3:12.

> "For whom the LORD loves He **chastens**,
> And scourges every son whom He receives." Hebrews 12:6

> "For whom the LORD loves He corrects,
> Just as a father the son in whom he delights." Proverbs 3:12

Because of the surety of Christ's love for this church, and because He is taking the opportunity to both rebuke and chasten them, they are expected to take action. As He next says, "Therefore, be zealous and repent."

Here, Jesus uses the verb form of the adjective used in verse 3:16, translated as "hot." Just as they were not "hot" and bubbling over for the Lord, He is asking them to redirect and bubble over with their desire to correct their deficiencies. The word here gives the

sense of setting their heart on what is right and remaining focused and intent upon obtaining it.

The word "repent," as always, signifies a changing of the mind. It is to think differently about the direction one is taking and to correct that by taking the new direction. Their thoughts were, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing." Their thoughts are now to be, "regardless of what state I am in this physical world, I need to rely solely on Jesus for my right-standing before God in all spiritual matters."

Life application: Jesus really slammed the Laodiceans for their lukewarm attitude, but He hasn't departed the halls of the church yet. They still have their lampstand and He is still walking among them, if only they will repent.

Because He loves them, His words are not simply to condemn. He is personally making the plea and there is nowhere left for them in His presence should they reject His words of kindness.

Jesus' words are as a Father to his child, correcting them for their good so that they will not end up in a bad place. Eventually, we will all stand before Him for either judgment leading to rewards or losses, or for judgment leading to condemnation. Let us strive to gain understanding before that day and let us take to heart His words of rebuke.

The word translated as "be zealous" is written in the present tense. It is, therefore, a continuing action and something that is needed constantly. May each one of us evaluate ourselves closely and hold fast to the words of our Lord, Master, and Savior. Let us hold fast to Jesus.

Glorious and wonderful Lord! Even in the midst of Your strongest words of correction, Your love for us is evident. Help us to never take this love for granted, but to hold fast to it as a precious jewel of truth. When our thoughts are wrong, may we repent and turn from them to You for our eternal joy! Thank You for Your patience with us. What a wonderful, glorious King You are! Amen.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. Revelation 3:20

Jesus is speaking to the church at Laodicea. He has had no commendation for them, but He has indirectly told them that He loves them. And more, they are not at the point of total rejection. However, at some point that may come about if they fail to respond. With that in mind, He now says to them, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."

The tense of the verbs is perfect (have stood) and present (*am* knocking) – "Behold, I have stood at the door and am knocking." Christ is using metaphor to convey a truth. There is a door which obstructs His entry. Being a door, it can be opened; it is not a wall. The door, however, requires someone else to open it. This is the implication of the words "and knock." The Lord has placed Himself at the door, and He has been making His appeal continuously (*am* knocking).

This is clearly given to remind the reader of the words of the Song of Solomon –

> "I sleep, but my heart is awake;
> *It is* the voice of my beloved!
> He knocks, *saying,*
> 'Open for me, my sister, my love,
> My dove, my perfect one;
> For my head is covered with dew,
> My locks with the drops of the night.'" Song of Solomon 5:2

Just as the king (Solomon) is at the door of the one he loves, knocking for entry, so is Christ the King, knocking at the door of those He loves. The word translated as knock means to rap on a door to gain admittance. It is used by Jesus in Matthew 7:7 –

> "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

It is also seen twice in Acts 12 –

> "And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. **14** When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. **15** But they said to her, 'You are beside yourself!' Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, 'It is his angel.'
> **16** Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. **17** But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, 'Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.' And he departed and went to another place." Acts 12:13-17

Using this metaphor is purposeful. Elsewhere, Jesus said, "I am the door," such as in John 10:9. The meaning of this is that He is the access point to heaven. The Greek word

can mean either “gate” or “door,” and it corresponds to the Hebrew word translated as “gate” used, for example, in Genesis 28:17 –

> “Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know *it.*’ **17** And he was afraid and said, “How awesome *is* this place! This *is* none other than the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven!’”

This was when Jacob had his vision of a ladder ascending to heaven where the “angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” Jesus then takes that account and ascribes it to Himself in John 1:52. Christ is the way to heaven, and He is the access point to heaven. And yet, in this verse in revelation, He is shown to be knocking on another door, petitioning the one inside to open it. In other words, man should be coming to Christ, who is the Door, and petitioning Him to allow access through Him into heaven, and yet Christ condescends to stand at the unbeliever’s door and petition him to allow Him in.

With this symbolism understood, He next says, “If anyone hears My voice and opens the door.” This tells us that, like the account in Acts, the person on the inside is not only given a rap to alert them that someone is outside, but they have then been explicitly told who is outside. Further, this is speaking to an individual as opposed to the entire church. While the church may be lost, the person can still be saved.

In other words, the Lord is using these metaphors to relay a truth. God wants fellowship with someone who has failed to come to Him. He initiates the action, alerting him that He is there, and He then identifies Himself so that there can be no doubt who He is. When the heart of the person is willing, he opens the door – meaning he allows the Lord in. The terminology is simple and explicit. Further, it shows the simplicity of the process. To open a door takes little effort. The action occurs and the fellowship is realized. Faith is the key.

When a favorable response is made, and the door is opened, the Lord then says, “I will come in to him and dine with him.” The words here (as well as elsewhere) clearly demonstrate that the Calvinistic doctrine of “irresistible grace” is false. God does not regenerate people in order to believe, causing them to believe, which then saves them. That is not only an illogical doctrine, it is unbiblical.

Rather, when the response is favorable and the door is opened, the Lord promises that He will dine with that person. The imagery here is that of close fellowship and intimacy. To dine with someone brings a state of closeness that is almost unmatched in human experience. To further bolster this, Jesus ends with, “and he with Me.”

In other words, this is not like what happened with Abraham in Genesis 18 –

> "So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, 'Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead *it* and make cakes.' **7** And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave *it* to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. **8** So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set *it* before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate."
>
> -Genesis 18:6-8

James 2:23 says –

> "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God."

The Genesis account of Abraham watching the Lord eat came long after the words cited by James occurred. And yet, despite being called the friend of God, he did not participate in the meal with the Lord. However, because of Christ, not only does the Lord dine with a person, but the person also dines with the Lord. The gospels describe such a meal, where those who dine recline, even leaning on one another –

> "Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved."
>
> -John 13:23

In this, there is the idea of intimacy and fellowship that the Lord is conveying. It is something only possible with the Lord through receiving Christ, allowing Him into one's heart. This verse in Revelation speaks beautifully of the transmission of the gospel to a dead church. Who will respond?

Although it is fashionable to belittle those who say, "Christ is knocking on the door of your heart," this is the exact symbolism that is being conveyed. Christ initiated the process, He identifies Himself through the message, and if a response is made, He comes in. It is reflected in the words of Paul –

> "But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): **9** that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:8-10

Of this verse in Revelation, Albert Barnes provides the following insights –

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1) that the invitation of the gospel is made to all - “if any man hear my voice”;
2) that the movement toward reconciliation and friendship is originated by the Saviour - “behold, I stand at the door and knock”;
3) that there is a recognition of our own free agency in religion - “if any man will hear my voice, and open the door”;
4) the ease of the terms of salvation, represented by “hearing his voice,” and “opening the door”; and,
5) the blessedness of thus admitting him, arising from his friendship - “I will sup with him, and he with me.” What friend can man have who would confer so many benefits on him as the Lord Jesus Christ? Who is there that he should so gladly welcome to his bosom?

Life application: After taking a strong and disapproving stand against the church at Laodicea because of their lukewarm attitude towards Him, He lovingly calls them back to Himself with a most precious offer. When we deal with those we know, the friendships develop in various ways. Some stay friendly but social, some become “go to the movies” friendly, some never really develop, and some make us rejoice when we draw near. But the friendships which become the most heartfelt and personal are the ones that involve a meal.

“Come to my house for dinner” normally means a close and personal friendship has sprung up and the type of conversation is far different than that of other interpersonal relationships. Jesus says to the Laodiceans, “I have offered My life for you and you haven’t respected that offer, but I’m willing to completely change the relationship if you will only let Me.” And so, the Lord stands at the door and knocks. In other words, He isn’t going to force Himself on anyone, but will rather allow those, who are willing, to open the door of their own volition. And it only takes one person to open a door, not the entire congregation – churches are not saved; people are.

That one person may be the inspiration to revive the entire group. If you are in a church that is in a poor spiritual condition, are you the one who will step forward and help revive the hearts of stone? Jesus is knocking and He is patiently waiting. When the door is open, He will flood each of those in the room who respond with His glory.

This verse isn’t meant to be applicable solely to the group, although it could be if the whole group responds. Instead, His terminology is personal – “I will come in to him and

dine with him, and he with Me." Jesus is calling the individual and he who responds will have a meal with the King of kings.

Someday, a heavenly supper is coming, and it will be a banquet like no other. For those who respond to the call of Christ, what is stated here will be realized in an actual way. Get yourself ready for the choicest dining experience you can imagine… a meal with Jesus!

O God, to sit and dine with our Lord and Savior! It is more than we can imagine – nourishing ourselves with the Bread of Life and drinking wine from the Cup of Salvation. Even now, we have a foretaste of this glorious meal as we join together in the Lord's Supper. What a joy to participate in this as we await that greater feast to come. And may it be soon! Amen.

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. Revelation 3:21

Jesus now pronounces the final benefit for those who overcome. Again, to overcome simply means to be saved through the gospel of Jesus Christ. When one believes in the Son, he overcomes, and salvation is granted. That person is sealed with the Holy Spirit as a promise of future redemption. To get the full picture of what it means to overcome, please refer to the commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Churches do not overcome. Rather, the people who comprise the church do. Concerning those who overcome, Jesus says to them, "I will grant to sit with Me on My throne."

Rather than "on," the Greek reads "in my throne." In this, there is a closeness to Christ that is expressed in this general way. Jesus' words in John 17:20, 21 further reveal this closeness when He said, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; **21** that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

To sit in the throne speaks of this unity that Jesus prayed to the Father for. In this, He is not speaking of a literal throne. God does not have parts; He is Spirit. He is speaking of the position of power and authority which He possesses. That power and authority is derived from God. Christ earned the right to that authority through the completion of His work (Matthew 28:18). Christ then shares that with those who overcome. This was spoken of by Paul in Romans –

> "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him,* that we may also be glorified together."
>
> -Romans 8:16, 17

Being "joint heirs with Christ" signifies exactly what Jesus is referring to now. This will be a heavenly rule that will last for all eternity. Again, Paul states this in Ephesians –

> "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, **7** that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."
>
> -Ephesians 2:4-7

This is promised to all who believe in the Son. In this, they overcome and participate in what He has earned the right to. As He says, "as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." Again, the word should be translated "in." It says, "in His throne." Christ sits in the throne of His Father, having accomplished the work He was sent to do. And in having done nothing to earn it, but through an act of grace from God, those who believe in the Son are granted the opportunity to participate in that glorious position for all eternity. Thank God for Jesus Christ.

As a review of the promises to those who overcome, and as a snapshot of the redemptive process which began in the Garden of Eden, one can look at the promises made to the faithful and see the progression which leads us from Eden to Heaven –

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. 2: 7 (Genesis – The Garden. Access to eternal life is restored).

He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. 2:11 (Genesis – The Garden. The possibility of death is removed.)

To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*. 2:17 (Exodus – The wilderness. Christ is the true Manna which sustains God's people for eternal life. With the new name, comes a new nature.)

And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

He shall rule them with a rod of iron;
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—
as I also have received from My Father; **28** and I will give him the morning star. 2:27, 28 (Davidic Rule. Believers are granted rule in the eternal kingdom and are set as jewels in the diadem of Christ's crown.)

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 3:5 (Atonement/Justification – believers are imputed Christ's sinless nature and Christ our Advocate speaks on our behalf.)

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name. 3:12 (The Temple – what the earthly temple pictured is realized in the promises of the New Jerusalem. Believers will share in Christ's eternal nature.)

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 3:21 (Heavenly Rule – the Most Holy Place. Believers are granted joint-heir status in Christ's position of power. Man lost his right to rule in the Garden; Christ restores this to humanity forever.)

Life application: The only way to overcome the power of the devil, and the world, he controls is by faith that Jesus is the Son of God. If one denies this, then he remains under the control of the devil. He will never participate in the glories to come. However, for those who call on Jesus by faith, we have the wonderful promises of glory made in Him.

In the earthly temple, there was no place to sit. The work of the priests was never done because sin continuously needed to be atoned for. But Hebrews 1:3 says that when Jesus had purged our sins, He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." In other words, the work was finished and the "rest" which man was offered in Eden became available to all who trust in Him.

Hebrews 4:3 says that "we who have believed do enter that rest." Jesus Christ promises us so very much if we will simply have faith in Him and His works. The glorious promise of reigning and resting with Him is the crown of the honors we will receive. Isaiah 11:10 says that the place of His rest will be glorious.

Zechariah then shows us that Christ is the fulfillment of both the priestly and kingly offices. He is a Priest on His throne. In this, "the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zechariah 6:13). Hallelujah and Amen, Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for our glorification. In accomplishing these things, He sat down! He is great, He is glorious, He is Jesus!

Lord Jesus, just to see Your face is enough for us. We long for that day with a burning desire. But You have promised us so many glories in addition to this. We are overwhelmed by the great grace and mercy You have lavished upon us, Your unworthy servants. Praises be to You for all eternity. Amen.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 3:22

The Lord now provides His final words to those at Laodicea, and – indeed – to all the churches He has addressed in chapters 2 and 3. He again uses the same formula as with all the other churches, beginning with, "He who has an ear, let him hear."

One last time, He is calling to attention something of the highest importance. To "hear" means more than just sound entering into the ears. It calls for heeding what is conveyed. Both attention and obedience are to be applied to what is heard. Thus, He is calling out, "Heed what you have heard, be attentive to it, and be obedient in your attention." But more, He again states, "what the Spirit says."

This isn't just a call to remember what was heard in order to write it down. Rather, it is what the Spirit, who is the member of the Godhead who inspires Scripture, was speaking through Christ. There is One God displayed in three members of the Godhead. Each works in accord with the other to reveal God's intentions, purposes, and word. In this case, it is what the Spirit says, "to the churches."

As noted in 2:7, these words could be taken in one of two ways: 1) everything said to all the churches, or 2) everything said to each church. In other words, the first option is that the Spirit is conveying one message to all the churches combined – every person in every church should heed everything that is said in all seven letters. Or, He is conveying a message to Ephesus, one to Thyatira, one to Sardis, and so on. Each church is to pay heed to what is said to it.

The answer is that all people (He who hears) are to listen to everything that is said to all the churches. There are seven letters to individual churches, but the message to each church is to be heard by all people. The repetition to each church is to call to attention its own issues, but all people in all churches are to know what the status of all churches

is. Thus, they can fully know what is pleasing, what is displeasing, and what the promises of overcoming are.

In this, it is evident that the seven letters address specific problems within each church, but they are problems that can be expected to arise in any church at any time in all of history. Thus, the seven letters to these seven churches are, together, an all-inclusive list to be heeded by all bodies of believers throughout the church age. No specific church or denomination can be singled out as being represented by one of these seven churches.

For example, it is popular to ascribe the failings of a particular church to the RCC and say, "This letter is speaking of Roman Catholicism." This is an improper way of viewing these seven letters. The Roman Catholic Church has had (and continues to have) all kinds of error in its history. Such error within the RCC can be identified in the problems of any given church within these seven letters. It, and any other denomination or body, is to take heed to what is said to all seven of these churches and to ensure that the failings of that church (or the notes of commendation) are to be identified and responded to accordingly.

This concept is stated articulately enough by the Pulpit Commentary –

"The seven messages were not merely separate admonitions addressed only to each particular Church, but all the epistles were meant for all the seven Churches, and, after them, for the universal Church. Each Church had an especial failing brought more emphatically before it; but still the seven warnings are one whole, for the edification of all. As it behooves the individual Christian to avoid and repent of all sin, and yet to fix his attention on the cure of some besetting sin to which he is peculiarly liable, so these messages, though intended to be read by all, and heeded by all, place vividly before each Church its besetting sin, which more particularly requires attention. And as the sins to be avoided are to be avoided by all, so the separate rewards arc promised to all who overcome. They are, therefore, not really distinct rewards, but rather different phases and views of one great whole, which shall be enjoyed in its entirety by those who have struggled victoriously with the trials and temptations of the world."

<u>Life application:</u> If you have been carefully following the words of Jesus as given to us in these seven precious letters, and if you have taken to heart the messages He has given us, then you should be fully prepared to know when you or your church is diverting from His admonitions, and you should have an understanding of how to handle such a diversion.

Jesus is not the cosmic pushover that people portray Him as. He is the Prince of Peace, but He is also the God who avenges His people, the Judge of sin, and the One who will someday return to weed out all wickedness and unrighteousness. Jesus is speaking this one last time to "He who has an ear," and when we listen and take heed, we will receive all of the wondrous promises given to the one who overcomes.

Thank You Lord Jesus for the wonderful promises You have given to those who have trusted in You alone for their salvation. Thank You for the wisdom You have given us in Your word which is meant to guide us, correct us, and lead us to You. And, Lord, give us the wise understanding to follow Your directions there all the days of our lives. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." Revelation 4:1

The fourth chapter of Revelation corresponds to the fourth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The fourth letter, *dalet*, signifies a door. Here in verse 4:1, a door is mentioned. The marvelous structure of the corresponding letters/chapters is beautifully continued in this. Also, this verse marks the major dividing line given back in verse 1:19 –

> "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."

John begins this verse with, "After these things." The words "these things" correspond to the "things which are," meaning the church age. Its specific contents ended with the previous verse.

The "things which will take place after this" details the tribulation period, the millennial reign of Christ, and the new order of things when there are a new heavens and a new earth. The contents of those things begin immediately after this verse. Therefore, verse 4:1 is a transition verse between "the things which are" and "the things which will take place after this."

Understanding this, John says, "I looked." The Greek indicates, "I saw." He is not redirecting his attention. Rather, a new part of the vision is coming into focus, as if watching a TV and a new scene begins. His attention is refocused on a new scene following the previous one of Christ walking among the churches and evaluating them. That has now faded into the past, but the book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. His eyes are going from the work of Christ in the church age to the next phase of His work. Christ is still the focus. Understanding this, John says, "and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven."

The symbolism is still Christ. The "door standing open in heaven" is Jesus. For this, we go back to Revelation 3:8 which says, "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it." Also, as He said in John 10 –

> "Then Jesus said to them again, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. **8** All who *ever* came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did

not hear them. [9] I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.'" John 10:7-9

It is the same door (gate – the words mean the same thing in both the Hebrew and the Greek) that is seen in Genesis 32 –

Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.
[13] And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. [14] Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. [15] Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."
[16] Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know *it.*" [17] And he was afraid and said, "How awesome *is* this place! This *is* none other than the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven!"
Genesis 32:12-17

Everything about Jacob's vision pictured Christ (refer to the Superior Word sermon on this Genesis passage to understand this), including the gate (door). Christ is the opened door that John beholds. Jesus spoke of this scene in John 1:51, confirming it is so. Understanding this typology, John next says, "And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me."

The word "was" is misleading, and it should not be inserted here. It should simply read, "And the first voice which I heard, like a trumpet, speaking with me." It takes the reader back to Revelation 1:10. The voice is that of Christ Jesus. He now speaks again in this newly revealed vision, saying, "Come up here."

The words are speaking to John, who is now in a transitional phase from the church age vision to a new vision. The next clause will show this. For now, the comparable passage of Scripture to understand what John is seeing is from 1 Thessalonians 4 –

"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. [16] For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the

voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. **18** Therefore comfort one another with these words."

-1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

For those who deny a literal rapture, what John is seeing now is, obviously, dismissed as such. However, the context is clear. John is being presented as the viewer of the redemptive panorama. As such, what he sees is what has occurred, is occurring, and will occur. As this verse transitions between two major scenes, what is occurring in this verse is what the Bible reveals for those who are to later participate in those same events.

Despite being downplayed, belittled, or dismissed by those who do not accept the premise of a pre-tribulation rapture (or any rapture at all), this is exactly what is being conveyed by the Lord to John (and thus to us). The church age is ended. The Door stands open in heaven, and John is instructed to "Come up here," meaning to heaven. Along with that, the Lord says, "and I will show you things which must take place after this."

John will next behold what comes after the church age, and after the rapture. The view goes from John on the earth viewing earthly things to John in heaven viewing both heavenly and earthly things. Of those earthly things, they are those that unfold particularly during the seven years of tribulation on earth.

It is a seven-year period granted to Israel in Daniel's vision of the seventy weeks (meaning seventy periods of seven-years) found in Daniel 9:24-27. There are seven years remaining to be fulfilled. The next major section of Revelation will deal with those seven years where Israel is the focus of the narrative.

<u>Life application:</u> By faith in Christ, we are granted access into heaven. Belief in the gospel is rewarded with eternal salvation. When a person calls on Jesus, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14) and this is irrevocable.

Someday, the Lord will then call His church home and the world will face judgment for rejecting Him. Whether you believe in the rapture or not is irrelevant. It is what the Bible teaches. There is no other way to properly interpret these verses than in their literal sense.

If you are a saved believer in Jesus Christ and you have been taught that there is no such thing as the rapture, then the only difference between you and believers who do accept this doctrine is that you will be more surprised at Jesus' coming.

Those who are waiting for this day are those who have the blessed assurance of God who doesn't lie and doesn't make things up to confuse His people. As Paul states so well in 2 Timothy 4:8 – "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Yes, Lord, we love the thought of Your appearing and of the day when the great call for us to rise to You at the rapture comes. It is our blessed hope, our most joyful thought, our heartfelt prayer, and the desire of our heart. To be with You! Oh, to see Your face and rejoice in the glory of Your presence for eternity is the most precious gift of all! We wait anxiously for that day. Amen.

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. Revelation 4:2

The revelation now completes its transition from the earthly inspection of the churches to a heavenly scene. John was called up through the open door, and he is now seeing the things "which must take place after this" (4:1), meaning the church age.

In order to see the unfolding of the redemptive narrative, John is taken to see a heavenly vision and the splendor and glory that is found there. Although different in content and location (heaven), it is not unlike visions of the prophets of old, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and so on. Much symbolism will be used, but in this symbolism, we are to find Jesus. As this is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, it is He who is being unveiled. Keeping that in mind, the vision will make complete sense.

To begin his description, John begins with, "Immediately I was in the Spirit." The Greek more literally reads, "Immediately I became in the Spirit." Although it doesn't say that he was caught up into heaven, the implication is that it was so. If he saw an open door in heaven, and the voice says, "Come up here," and now he is beholding heaven, the inference is obvious – he has been translated to heaven. This is not unlike what Paul says happened to him –

> [1]"It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions
> and revelations of the Lord: **[2]** I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—
> whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know,

God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. **3** And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— **4** how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." 2 Corinthians 12:1-4

To understand the term "in the Spirit," refer to verse 1:10. There is no article before "Spirit," and so it may or may not be the Holy Spirit that is being referred to, although that is the general assumption. However, Paul says that he did not know whether he was in the body or not. John may be aware of the fact that he is not in his physical body, and thus "in the spirit," meaning his own spirit without his physical body. Being dogmatic is unwise. Whatever his state, the vision that he beholds is to be the point of focus.

What is important to understand, however, is that the church (as an independent body) – which has been the central focus of Jesus' words for the past many verses – is not referred to again until Chapter 19. From an earthly perspective, it is Israel and judgment upon an unrepentant world that is referred to. Scenes from heaven or heavenly messengers will be interspersed throughout those coming chapters as well.

Once John notes that he is "in the Spirit," he next says, "and behold, a throne set in heaven." A throne symbolizes kingly authority and power. As this throne is in heaven, it is referring to the place of all rule and authority. Understanding this, it says, "and One sat on the throne." The vision is of Jesus – the incarnation of Yehovah. This is explained in verse 3:9 –

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Again, and as He Himself said in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." This is confirmed elsewhere as well. In Acts, Peter cites the 110th Psalm and ascribes it to Jesus –

"For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:
'The LORD said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."'
36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Acts 2:34-36

As God is Spirit and does not have parts, and thus He cannot be seen (1 John 4:12, and etc.), this is referring to the incarnate Lord, Jesus. To "sit at the right hand" of Yehovah means to sit in the position of power and authority. These, and other, examples from Scripture identify Jesus as the One being referred to. Each vision, or even differently described beings within a vision, will often reveal a different aspect of Jesus. This is the revelation, or unveiling, of Him. God is presenting Himself to us in a manner that we can understand. And that manner is through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Life application: John says he was immediately translated to heaven. How quickly is "immediately"? Paul explains the rapture's speed in 1 Corinthians –

> "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— **52** in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52

The human eye blinks in about 300 milliseconds and a person can blink almost 5 times in a single second. When the Lord calls His church home, it will be over before anyone knew it occurred. Concerning the rapture, the opened door will be unavailable to those left behind. Instead, all those who were not taken will enter the tribulation period. As soon as the church departs, it will be in the presence of God and beholding His throne.

As noted above, the One sitting on the throne is Jesus. God doesn't have parts and cannot be seen; He is Spirit. It is Jesus who forever reveals God the Father to us, and this will always be the case. Every physical manifestation of God that is presented is seen through the Person of Jesus Christ. This is important to understand because there will be many views of the heavenly throne room and many participants interacting with this throne – and each is God manifesting Himself through the Person of Jesus. Although this isn't something we can fully grasp, He is the One we are seeing in each instance. There is a day ahead when the church will be called home. The question we need to evaluate personally is, "Am I ready for that day?" Be wise and call on Jesus now. For those who do, heaven awaits.

Heavenly Father, we have friends and family who haven't yet called on You. We pray that You will send hints and opportunities to them to open their eyes. We pray that Your love for them in the giving of Christ Jesus will be revealed to them before the trumpet sounds and the church is taken. Terrible times are ahead for those who fail to come to You through faith in Him, and we pray the right decision will be made by them before that time comes. Amen.

And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and t*here was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Revelation 4:3

John now makes a detailed description of what he sees concerning the scene before him. As noted in the previous verse, he saw "a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne." This is what he continues to describe, beginning with, "And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance."

It is of note that he doesn't attempt to describe the One on the throne, except in relation to these two stones. The sight of Him is so magnificent and gleaming that this is all John could relay. He must have been completely overwhelmed by the amazing sight.

Of the two stones, Jasper is believed to be the same as the last stone mentioned in the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28:20. In the Hebrew there, the name is *yashepheh*. That comes from an unused root meaning "to polish." It is believed to be jasper because of the same general sounding name – *yashepheh*/jasper. Likewise, it is the Greek word *iaspis*, again sounding similar to our modern "jasper."

It will be the first of the twelve stones named in the foundation of New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:19. It is also mentioned in the construction of the wall in verse 21:18. And, it is also mentioned as a comparison to the light of the glory of God in Revelation 21–

> "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, **11** having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." Revelation 21:10, 11

Jasper stone varies in color, and the specific color is speculated on. However, the symbolism of Revelation 21 speaks out what John is trying to relay. There is the light of the glory of God emanating through the color, or from the color, that speaks of His infinite perfection, glory, and holiness.

The sardius is generally accepted as corresponding to carnelian, and thus it is a red stone. It is also seen in Revelation 21:20. It is the sixth foundation stone of New Jerusalem. It can only be speculated as to what the significance is. Red could correspond to the scarlet robe of a king. It could also signify atonement, as in the blood that Christ shed. Or it could symbolize judgment, war, and so on (see Isaiah 63:1). The description simply provides us with a sense of glory and awe at the marvelous nature of the One on the throne.

Next, John says, "and *there was* a rainbow around the throne." The word "rainbow" comes from the Greek *iris*. It is seen only here and in verse 10:1. Charles Ellicott's view on this is suitable. He says it is "the evident symbol of the divine mercy. The allusion to the bow in the cloud (Genesis 9:12-16) is obvious; the bow completely encircled the throne, as mercy encompassing judgment."

John continues to describe it, saying it was "in appearance like an emerald." The emerald is also seen in verse 21:19, being the fourth stone of the foundation of New Jerusalem. The name "emerald" is used to translate the third stone in the first row of stones in the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28:17. The stone there is the *bareqeth*. That comes from the word *baraq*, which means "flashing" or "lightning." That tells us pretty much nothing of value in determining what the stone there actually is, and it may or may not be the same stone as is seen now in Revelation.

The color of the emerald may symbolize mercy. If so, the green rainbow encircling the throne could possibly signify the mercy that can only be found at the throne of grace. All believers who behold the blood-red appearance of the Lord will also know that it is through His redemption that we find mercy. If the rainbow is, in fact, circular, it would then signify unending mercy to those who have called on the Lord by faith. These are best guess evaluations and should not be stretched too far or argued too dogmatically.

Life application: The comments for the previous verse included the thought that every manifestation of God that is given in the Bible is seen through the Person of Jesus Christ. Far too often, Bible commentators attribute this scene or others like it to God the Father. Such is not the case. To understand who this is speaking of, we need to refer to 1 Timothy 6:14-16 –

> "…that you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, **15** which He will manifest in His own time, *He who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **16** who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom *be* honor and everlasting power. Amen."

As God the Father reveals Himself to us, He does it through His Son, Jesus Christ – the "blessed and only Potentate" and the "King of kings and Lord of lords."

The heavenly throne room we are viewing is the glorious position of Jesus Christ who sits at the right hand of God the Father. This is not *a physical* position, but rather a position reflecting *authority*. As no man can see God, and as John is seeing One on the throne, then John is seeing a vision of the One who reveals the unseen God to us – the

God/Man, Jesus Christ. The vision is apocalyptic in nature, but it is given to describe Jesus.

What a glorious thing we hope for some wonderful day, to see the One who has brought us back to You, O God. We long to see Jesus in all of His glory and splendor as He reveals You to us for all eternity. How wonderful it will be to walk in the light of Your glory and to behold His splendid majesty for all eternity. What a wonderful hope the believer in You has. Hallelujah… our hearts rejoice in what lies ahead! Amen.

Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. Revelation 4:4

John just described the throne where the Lord sits in heaven, now he continues with, "Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones." The idea of a throne is that of rule and authority, just as in the previous verses. There is an order in heaven where God has placed thrones representing the actions of a court as one might find in an earthly rule, such as the "seven princes of Persia and Media" of Esther 1:14, or other such references in Scripture. Jesus speaks of this type of thing in Matthew 19 –

> "So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" Matthew 19:28

Whether these twenty-four thrones are actual or symbolic can be argued, but either way, they represent an established authority of some type – actual or typological. From there, John next says, "and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting." The concept of the thrones was stated first to show the type of category that is filled by the elders. From there, the elders are then mentioned to reveal that they fill that category.

The word "elder" is *presbuteros*. It signifies a mature man, seasoned in judgment. Again, whether these are literal or symbolic of a type of authority that is set in the heavenly realm can be argued. Either way, a state of such authority does exist. With this in mind, Albert Barnes provides a most extensive thought on the matter. Despite being rather long, it is precise and well laid out. Therefore, it is cited here –

Very various opinions have been entertained in respect to those who thus appeared sitting around the throne, and to the question why the number twenty-four is

mentioned. Instead of examining those opinions at length, it will be better to present, in a summary manner, what seems to be probable in regard to the intended reference. The following points, then, would appear to embrace all that can be known on this subject:

1) These elders have a regal character, or are of a kingly order. This is apparent:
    a. because they are represented as sitting on "thrones," and
    b. because they have on their heads "crowns of gold."
2) they are emblematic. They are designed to symbolize or represent some class of persons. This is clear:
    a. because it cannot be supposed that so small a number would compose the whole of those who are in fact around the throne of God, and,
    b. because there are other symbols there designed to represent something pertaining to the homage rendered to God, as the four living creatures and the angels, and this supposition is necessary in order to complete the symmetry and harmony of the representation.
3) they are human beings, and are designed to have some relation to the race of man, and somehow to connect the human race with the worship of heaven. The four living creatures have another design; the angels Revelation 5:1-14 have another; but these are manifestly of our race - persons from this world before the throne.
4) they are designed in some way to be symbolic of the church as redeemed. Thus, they say Revelation 5:9, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."
5) they are designed to represent the whole church in every land and every age of the world. Thus, they say Revelation 5:9, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." This shows, further, that the whole representation is emblematic; for otherwise in so small a number - twenty-four - there could not be a representation out of every nation.
6) they represent the church triumphant - the church victorious. Thus, they have crowns on their heads; they have harps in their hands Revelation 5:8; they say that they are "kings and priests," and that they will "reign on the earth," Revelation 5:10.
7) the design, therefore, is to represent the church triumphant - redeemed - saved - as rendering praise and honor to God; as uniting with the hosts of heaven in adoring him for his perfections and for the wonders of his grace; As representatives of the church, they are admitted near to him; they encircle his throne; they appear victorious over every foe; and they come, in unison with the living creatures, and the angels, and the whole universe Revelation 5:13, to ascribe power and dominion to God.
8) as to the reason why the number "twenty-four" is mentioned, perhaps nothing certain can be determined. Ezekiel, in his vision Ezekiel 8:16; Ezekiel 11:1, saw

twenty-five men between the porch and the altar, with their backs toward the temple, and their faces toward the earth - supposed to be representations of the twenty-four "courses" into which the body of priests was divided 1 Peter 2:9), and to have alluded to the fact that the priesthood under the Jewish economy was divided into twenty-four courses, each with a presiding officer, and who was a representative of that portion of the priesthood over which he presided. If so, then the ideas which enter into the representation are these:

(a) That the whole church may be represented as a priesthood, or a community of priests - an idea which frequently occurs in the New Testament.

(b) That the church, as such a community of priests, is employed in the praise and worship of God - an idea, also, which finds abundant countenance in the New Testament.

(c) That, in a series of visions having a designed reference to the church, it was natural to introduce some symbol or emblem representing the church, and representing the fact that this is its office and employment. And,

(d) that this would be well expressed by an allusion derived from the ancient dispensation - the division of the priesthood into classes, over each one of which there presided an individual who might be considered as the representative of his class.

9) It is to be observed, indeed, that in one respect they are represented as" kings," but still this does not forbid the supposition that there might have been intermingled also another idea, that they were also "priests." Thus, the two ideas are blended by these same elders in Revelation 5:10; "And hath made us unto our God kings and priests." Thus understood, the vision is designed to denote the fact that the representatives of the church, ultimately to be triumphant, are properly engaged in ascribing praise to God. The word "elders" here seems to be used in the sense of aged and venerable men, rather than as denoting office. They were such as by their age were qualified to preside over the different divisions of the priesthood.

In his commentary, Barnes somewhat dismisses the number twenty-four. However, EW Bullinger rightly defines it as "the number associated with the heavenly government and worship, of which the earthly form in Israel was only a copy. We are told that both Moses and David ordered all things connected with the Tabernacle and Temple worship by direct revelation from God, and as a copy of things in the heavens, Hebrews 8:5; 1 Chronicles 28:12, 19. And the sevenfold phrase (in Exo 40) 'as the LORD commanded Moses' witnesses to the Divine ordering of all. It was so with the twenty-four courses of

priests in the earthly Temple; these were formed on the 'pattern of things in the heavens.' In Revelation 4, we read of the twenty-four heavenly elders, who are the twelve Patriarchs from the Old Testament and the twelve Apostles from the New.'"

Whether these are actually the Patriarchs and Apostles, or symbolic of them can, again, be debated. However, they are certainly representative of what issued from them – meaning the tribes of Israel, and the body of believers we today call the "church." Of these men, John says they are "clothed in white robes."

This idea of white robes will be defined later in Revelation 19:8 to indicate "the righteous acts of the saints" (NKJV), or the "righteousness of the saints" (Webster's). What seems more appropriate is the latter. It is the imputed righteousness of Christ. These elders are purified through Christ and are sanctified for the role they have been appointed. The idea of white garments has already been presented in Revelation 3:4.

Finally, John finishes the verse with the words, "and they had crowns of gold on their heads." This is a reference to the position of ruling authority that accompanied the idea of sitting on thrones. However, this could extend to priestly duties as well. The high priest of Israel had a plate of pure gold on his turban which identified his priestly office. Thus, the crowns may signify both kingly and priestly authority.

Again, these beings that are described may only be symbolic, and they could simply be reflective of the single office of Christ. He is the Human who represents all redeemed humanity before God – both Israel of old and the church. This would appear to be wrong based on, for example, verse 4:10 where "the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne." But as long as the scene is given as only typology, it would be no different than that of the slain Lamb and the four living creatures of verse 5:6. In that verse, the four living creatures (yet to be mentioned) and the twenty-four elders are noted in one verse. As will be seen, the four living creatures will, in fact, represent aspects of Christ.

<u>Life application:</u> Jesus is the focal point of all of Scripture. It is important to not take something that is apocalyptic in nature and then dogmatically state that it is describing something that can only be inferred. In the case of the twenty-four elders, they may represent actual humans in the number given. They may represent a body of authority that is reflected in the descriptions given. They may represent all believers from both Israel and the church. Or, they may represent the authority of Christ over the redeemed of both the Mosaic and New Covenants. As such, these may not be literal thrones in heaven with literal people on them.

The book of Revelation is carefully describing a heavenly scene in a manner that we can comprehend, and which is to then reveal spiritual truths. In the end, all righteousness (white garments) comes from Christ alone. Likewise, all authority – both kingly and priestly – is derived from Christ alone. With this in mind, we can be secure in our theology even if lesser points are debated over.

Lord Jesus, all rule in heaven and on earth belongs to You. To You every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess. Your word states that it is so. Help us to be willing to stand up for these truths and to proclaim that there is one path to salvation and only one way to be right before God. May we never waffle in this matter. Without You, there is no hope. But through You, there is eternal peace and security. Thank You for what You offer to the people of the world! Amen.

And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Revelation 4:5

John is still describing the scene of the throne that stood before him. In the previous verse, there were the twenty-four elders sitting on twenty-four thrones around the main throne. The attention is now directed again to that main throne saying, "And from the throne proceeded lightnings." The translation is incorrect. The verb is in the present tense to highlight the constant nature of what is occurring – "And from the throne proceed lightnings."

Lightning is given as a display of the power of God. In Job 1:16, what is called "the fire of God" is believed to be describing lightning. It is a consuming fire that can be carefully directed to take life, or to move those close by to fear.

Next, John notes "thunderings." These are probably a result of the lightnings, as one would expect during any large storm. The lightning is the visible display, while the accompanying thunder accentuates the terrifying effects of the display.

Thirdly, John says, "and voices." The content of the voices is not given, but it is probably referring to what is stated in Acts 13:27 –

> "For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*."

In other words, the voices are representative of the prophetic utterances of the Lord going forth, speaking His word from His divine throne. These are accompanied by the

lightnings and thunderings in order to display the terror of the word which goes forth. The scene is calling to mind the display seen by Israel at Mount Sinai –

> "Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there
> were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the
> sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who *were* in the
> camp trembled. **17** And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with
> God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. **18** Now Mount Sinai *was*
> completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke
> ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly."
> -Exodus 19:16-18

The difference between that account and this one in Revelation is striking. At Sinai, the Lord spoke out of the midst of the cloud and fire. There was no visible form of the Lord to behold. However, John sees the form of the Lord (verse 2 says, "and *One* sat on the throne"). The unseen Lord, Yehovah, of the Old Testament is shown to be Christ Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God. What was concealed in the Old is revealed in the New. However, it is the same Lord in all of His glorious splendor.

John next says, "Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne." The word is *lampas*, and it is where our modern term "lamps" is derived from. It signifies a lamp, torch, or light. Seven of them indicates spiritual perfection. It is the perfection of light radiating out of the throne. Of these John says, "which are the seven Spirits of God."

This takes the reader back to verse 3:1 where it says, "These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars." As noted, the seven Spirits are brought forward from Old Testament symbolism –

> "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
> And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
> **2** The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
> The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
> The Spirit of counsel and might,
> The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD." Isaiah 11:1, 2

The seven Spirits of God are these seven Spirits, each accomplishing its own purpose and yet united as one, resting on God's Christ. As He sits upon the throne of God, the seven Spirits of God issue forth from His throne.

Life application: As noted above, the heavenly scene in this verse is calling forth the memory of the Lord's manifestation of Himself on Mount Sinai. Later in Acts, we read this –

> "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. **2** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:1-4

Revelation 4:5 takes the reader to the very place where these past events originated – the throne of God Almighty which is occupied by the Lord Jesus. At Sinai, the people heard the law spoken out which would then be engraved on stone. They were given a law they couldn't fulfill to demonstrate to them the grace they needed.

Those in Jerusalem received the sealing of the Holy Spirit on hearts of flesh. They received the grace necessary for salvation from the Lord who fulfilled the law on their behalf. What proceeds from the throne here in Revelation will be judgment upon the world which has rejected those precepts and the grace offered through Christ. They have decided to do things their own way and they will be judged in the choice they have made.

Just, righteous, and holy is the Lord who will judge the unrepentant world during the tribulation period. This time of trouble is drawing near for the people who have rejected Him.

Lord, if fallen man only knew the tribulation that is set to come upon the world; if he only knew the absolute holiness of You who created him; if he could only reason out the more important issues of life… Lord, help us to be faithful witnesses to Your grace before the days of judgment issue forth from Your throne. Amen.

Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. Revelation 4:6

John continues the heavenly scene around and before the throne saying, "Before the throne there was a sea of glass." The word "glass" is an adjective and should read "glassy." It describes the appearance rather than what the sea is made of. The word is

only found in Revelation. This glassy sea is said to be "like crystal." This would then indicate its purity and clarity.

As this sea is "before the throne," it indicates that it must be crossed in order to reach the throne. The ark symbolized the throne, or dwelling place, of God in the tabernacle and temple. Therefore, the comparison is possibly being made to the bronze laver (a basin used for ceremonial ablutions) in the tabernacle and the bronze sea at the temple. The laver and the sea were used to hold water for ceremonial washing of the priests as they performed their duties. They were to "wash with water, lest they die. **21** So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die" (Exodus 30:20, 21).

This washing purified the priests externally so that they could minister. What then appears to be the meaning of this glassy sea reflects the absolutely pure and undefiled state of the One on the throne. It being like crystal would then indicate that it is reflective in nature. Thus, the purity and wholly undefiled state would, through God's light, sanctify those who come near to the throne, just as the laver/sea were used for such (external) sanctification. There is the power to transform those who approach into the purity of the image of Christ.

Next, John says, "And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures." Concerning this wording, Albert Barnes appears to correctly analyze the Greek –

"Not occupying the throne, but so as to appear to be intermingled with the throne, or 'in the midst' of it, in the sense that it was beneath the center of it. The meaning would seem to be, that the four living creatures referred to occupied such a position collectively that they at the same time appeared to be under the throne, so that it rested on them, and around it, so that they could be seen from any quarter. This would occur if their bodies were under the throne, and if they stood so that they faced outward. To one approaching the throne they would seem to be around it, though their bodies were under, or 'in the midst' of it as a support. The form of their bodies is not specified, but it is not improbable that though their heads were different, their bodies, that were under the throne, and that sustained it, were of the same form."

If his analysis is correct, it would then correspond to the construction of the sea used in Solomon's temple –

> "And he made the Sea of cast bronze, ten cubits from one brim to the other; *it was* completely round. Its height *was* five cubits, and a line of thirty cubits measured its circumference.

> [24] Below its brim *were* ornamental buds encircling it all around, ten to a cubit, all the way around the Sea. The ornamental buds *were* cast in two rows when it was cast. [25] It stood on twelve oxen: three looking toward the north, three looking toward the west, three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east; the Sea *was set* upon them, and all their back parts *pointed* inward."
>
> -1 Kings 7:23-25

Of these living creatures, it says that they are "full of eyes in front and in back." The thought here is that nothing is out of their view – they can see in all directions. Further, the implication is that they are open, signifying that they are always seeing and never resting. All that is done is taken in by them and evaluated by them. They would have discernment in all matters, physical and spiritual. Their gaze misses nothing, and they are ever vigilant.

Life application: Due to the apocalyptic nature of Revelation, there will obviously be a wide variety of ideas about what the symbolism of various scenes and events is conveying. Some can be more surely identified than others, but it is good to stick as closely as possible to a conservative evaluation. If Scripture elsewhere provides insights, it is to be used. If it does not, then take each symbol only so far and don't run off on wild speculation.

Considering the nature of God, when properly understood, will often give helpful insights – He is pure, undefiled, holy, merciful, etc. Transferring those attributes to symbols is an acceptable way of making the symbolism come alive to the reader. And so, sticking with what is known, and not going too far in one's own mind, is a sound way of looking at, and evaluating, the depictions.

Lord God, it is wonderful to know that someday faithful believers will actually gaze upon the throne of our Lord and see His majesty revealed to us. To think on His glory is simply beyond our comprehension. But You have given us advanced insights into the heavenly throne room in Your word. How wonderful is the depiction presented in its pages! Someday, our eyes will behold that wonderful scene. May that day be soon. Amen.

The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. Revelation 4:7

In this verse, we have the continued description of the four living creatures brought into the narrative in the previous verse. John describes them in terms that have already been

hinted at, or even explicitly seen in Scripture. Taking the various accounts and weaving them together, we can determine the meaning of the symbolism.

In Numbers, the tribes of Israel were encamped around the tabernacle in a very specific order. On each side, one main tribe was named, and it was accompanied by two other tribes that fell under its *degel*, or standard.

What each *degel* was is left unstated. However, it can be deduced by taking later passages in Scripture and combining what is said into one overall theme. This includes where we are now in Revelation 4:7.

Tradition says what they are – which is often a tad more than useless, and which normally leads to something meaning whatever one wishes – but the Bible also alludes to each. First is the standard of Judah, the Lion. Only one time in the Bible is the Lion specifically connected to Jesus. That is in Revelation 5:5 –

> "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." Revelation 5:5

The obvious connotation then is that the Lion is specifically connected to Judah. This confirms what was stated in Genesis –

> "Judah, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise;
> Your hand *shall be* on the neck of your enemies;
> Your father's children shall bow down before you.
> **9** Judah *is* a lion's whelp;
> From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
> He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
> And as a lion, who shall rouse him?" Genesis 49:8, 9

If we can determine one other standard, then we can form a pattern. And it can be done. Ephraim is represented by an ox several times in Scripture. The first time is in Deuteronomy 33. In the blessing of Joseph, of which Ephraim was the preeminent son, he is equated to a wild ox in verse 17. In Hosea 10:11, Ephraim is called a "trained heifer," meaning an ox. He is again called a bull in Jeremiah 31:18. These are sufficient to give two standards based on a vision of four living creatures seen in Ezekiel 1 –

> "As for the likeness of their faces, *each* had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on

the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle. **11** Thus *were* their faces." Ezekiel 1:10, 11

Ezekiel beheld a vision of four living creatures, each with four faces. The faces are described first as a man. Thus, it is the one Ezekiel is seeing first. To the right is a lion. The right from Ezekiel's position then corresponds to the east as the tribes are laid out. Thus, the man would be to the south, facing him, where the tribe of Reuben would be. On the left, meaning the west, was an ox. That matches where the tribe of Ephraim, the ox, is according to the camp layout. And that leaves the eagle facing north, where the tribe of Dan is. Thus, we can, with all certainty, see the four standards of the tribes – Judah is a Lion; Reuben is a Man; Ephraim is an Ox; and Dan is an eagle. From there, we can see the intended order of these in a numerical sequence from this verse from the book of Revelation –

"The first living creature *was* like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle." Revelation 4:7

The order of the faces is described by John in the same order as the layout of the four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew describes Jesus as the great Son of David, and thus King. The symbol of a king is a lion. The king is equated to a lion in Proverbs 19:12 –

"The king's wrath *is* like the roaring of a lion,
But his favor *is* like dew on the grass."

Kings are again equated with lions in Jeremiah 50:17 –

"Israel *is* like scattered sheep;
The lions have driven *him* away.
First the king of Assyria devoured him;
Now at last this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has broken his bones."

The symbolism of the lion representing a king is found in Ezekiel 32:2, and elsewhere, also. Next, Mark focuses on Jesus the Servant. The ox is considered a servant animal. In the third Gospel, Luke focuses on Jesus' humanity, calling Christ the Son of Man. He uses the term 26 times in this way. And finally, John focuses on Christ's deity, calling Him the Son of God, specifically 10 times, but alluding to the Father/Son relationship continually. The eagle is thus a symbol of John's Gospel, reflecting the Divine nature of Christ.

The camps are laid out by four standards in Numbers; the standards are revealed to us in Ezekiel; and their order is given to us in Revelation – an order that matches that of the four gospels. Thus, the four sets of tribes, consisting of twelve individual tribes, branching out from the tabernacle to the east, west, south, and north are reflective of the four gospels. They are the witness of the Lord who came and tabernacled among us.

What is recorded there reveals what was anticipated throughout the Old Testament, and that is then explained in the rest of Scripture, as to His Person, His work, and how it pertains to us.

The four creatures around the throne are representative of the four gospels. The eyes all around them are emblematic of the eternal witness of Christ and His fulfillment of the gospels. Everything He did was witnessed and testifies to His sinless perfection. Their being "in the midst of the throne, and around the throne" signifies that they are the central point of the record of Christ – His coming, His fulfillment of the promise of God, His faithful witness, and His centrality to the testimony of God in relation to humanity.

Life application: In the end, everything points to Jesus either directly or indirectly. What is veiled is there for us to unveil as we read and meditate on Scripture. The Person of Jesus Christ is the full and complete revelation of God to us in a form that we can understand. He is the glorious image of the invisible God. He is Jesus.

How wonderful it is to see our Lord and Savior revealed in the pages of the Holy Bible. Thank You, O God, for opening up wonderful pictures of Jesus to us in a manner we can understand and appreciate. Surely, You are a great and awesome God! You are full of splendor and majesty, and You are worthy of all of our praise and devotion! Amen.

***The* four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:**
"Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!" Revelation 4:8

Continuing with the symbolism of the four living creatures of the previous verses, John describes them further, saying, "*The* four living creatures, each having six wings." As noted, these four creatures represent the four gospels. They speak of the living Christ who came to accomplish His mission. The number four in Scripture speaks of creation. EW Bullinger defines it as –

"...that which follows the revelation of God, namely, His creative works. He is known by the things that are seen. Hence the written revelation commences with the words, 'In-the-beginning God CREATED.' Creation is therefore the next thing—the fourth thing, and the number four always has reference to all that is created. It is emphatically the number of Creation; of man in his relation to the world as created; while six is the number of man in his opposition to and independence of God. It is the number of things that have a beginning, of things that are made, of material things, and matter itself. It is the number of material completeness. Hence it is the world number, and especially the 'city' number."

Of the number six, he then says it "has to do with man; it is the number of imperfection; the human number; the number of MAN as destitute of God, without God, without Christ." That may seem inappropriate for a being before the throne of God, but it is the symbolism that is being relayed that is what is to be focused on. To get a further clue as to these beings, Isaiah 6 provides the following –

> "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. **2** Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one cried to another and said:
> 'Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts;
> The whole earth *is* full of His glory!'" Isaiah 6:1-3

In this, we have a representation of the four gospels – the message of Christ that goes throughout the whole world (the created order) to all peoples (the human number). Those who respond are covered by the *kanaph* (the Hebrew word for "wing"), meaning an edge or extremity. The covering of the face would signify reverence and humility, covering the feet would indicate obedience and possibly modesty, and flying with two wings swiftness in executing God's commands. Their wings then testify to the state of the redeemed in the world where the gospel has gone forth. With this understanding, John continues, saying they "were full of eyes around and within."

It is not the wings that are full of eyes, but the creatures. The idea is that their view remains unhindered even with the movement of the wings. The eyes are that which behold. In this case, and because the eyes are all over the creatures, they never stop viewing the Lord. Because of the glory they see, John says, "And they do not rest day or night."

As the creatures represent the gospel going forth to the people of the world, it is the continuous state of that since it was first given. It is an eternal message that never

ceases to be proclaimed. The eyes speak of what it beheld in the gospels concerning the glory of God. What is displayed there is beheld by man and the response is that the creatures then say –

> "Holy, holy, holy,
> Lord God Almighty,
> Who was and is and is to come!"

It is through the gospels that the nature of God – His Triune nature – is finally revealed to man. Thus, the call is known as the Trisagion, or "Thrice Holy." In the gospels, man discovers that God is Father, God is Son, and God is Holy Spirit. Each is *Kyrios ho Theos ho Pantokratōr*, or Lord the God the Almighty, and all are displayed through the Son. He is the focal point of our understanding of the Godhead. It is He who reveals the unseen God to us through the record of the gospels. As fully God, He is the One, "Who was and is and is to come."

The phrase takes the reader back to Revelation 1:4 & 1:8. To understand the terminology, you can refer to the commentary there. In the end, it is Jesus Christ who is on display to the whole world. Man is lost, and without Him, there is no hope. But through the message of the gospels, man can comprehend the nature of God who sent the Son to redeem him. The proclamation of "Holy, holy, holy" continues on forever because man who has come to Christ will live forever in the presence of God to declare His praise. It will be an unceasing chorus proclaiming His glory for all eternity.

A notable difference between Isaiah's vision and John's is when the seraphim in the temple at Jerusalem spoke, they said, "The whole earth is full of His glory." However, the angels in John's vision say, "Who was and is and is to come." The difference is that Isaiah was on earth and God's presence in the temple was radiating out through the world, illuminating it with His splendor. John, however, was taken to the heavenly throne room. Instead of speaking of His illumination of the creation (something already implied in the "four" gospels), the creatures proclaim His eternality – He is the one who transcends time, space, and matter which comprise His creation. He is infinitely and timelessly holy.

<u>Life application:</u> In the vision Isaiah beheld, the four living creatures are called *seraphim*. This word means "burning ones," and their burning appearance certainly comes from reflecting the glory of God. This is similar to Moses' face when he spoke with God. Afterward, his face shone radiantly. These creatures are always in the presence of God and therefore burn intensely. Therefore, they behold the glory of God directly and they are continuously strengthened in their being. They are ever being revitalized from the

glory of what they see and will be eternally awake, alert, and responsive to what they behold.

God is infinitely holy, or infinitely separated from what is fallen and sinful. In this repetition of "holy, holy, holy," there is an emphasis on God's supreme holiness. But holiness doesn't just separate "from," it also separates "to." When someone or something is dedicated and purified, there is a separation "to" God. The perfect separation to God for humans is to be united to Him through Christ and His work on our behalf.

In coming to Christ, the transfer from "condemned" to "saved" is made. This is not of ourselves, but because of God's work in Christ. He alone can make the change in fallen man because He alone is JESUS.

Simply unimaginable! O God, to gaze upon Your infinite glory and beauty is the desire of our hearts. Now we have Your word to meditate upon and to see what Your glory is like, but in the future, we will know intimately that which we now only see in our minds' eye. We long for that wonderful day when we behold You through our own living eyes! Amen.

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, Revelation 4:9

John just said that the four living creatures do not rest, both day and night, as they praise the Lord God almighty. Now, it says, "Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks." The Greek is in the future tense. It more rightly says, "Whenever the living creatures shall give..." Taking the thoughts from the two verses together from English versions, it seems to say that this is an endless cycle – praise and then result; praise and then result.

And it is true that this is something that will occur forever, but the wording in English translations fails to give the full sense. The word "whenever" is the Greek word *hotan*, (at the time when the condition is met). Thus, this doesn't indicate a rote form of worship, but rather it comes at different levels, and it occurs periodically but continuously.

Whenever these living creatures give glory – at any time, be it day or night – then the words here will come to pass. They shall give (future tense) *doxan*, or "glory." This word forms our word "doxology." Thayer's Lexicon says this is to "give or describe glory to God, why and how being evident from each case in the context: thus by declaring one's gratitude to God for a benefit received."

They also give *timen*, or "honor." This is described as "the honor which one has by reason of rank and state of office which he holds."

And, they also give *eucharistan*, or "thanks." This forms our word "Eucharist." The case in which this word is used indicates "the giving of thanks for God's grace" (HELPS Word Studies).

Each of these is directed "to Him who sits on the throne." The verb "sits" is a present participle. For all eternity, meaning the ages of ages, what is described here shall come to pass. As was previously explained, this is speaking of Jesus. He stated it in verse 3:21 –

> "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

To confirm that this is speaking of Jesus, John adds in another descriptor, saying it is He "who lives forever and ever." That is explained by Jesus in verse 1:18 (and elsewhere) –

> "I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore."

Life application: A similar phase to the one in this verse is used several other times in the book of Revelation. The point being made is that God has determined that Jesus Christ is to be the focal point for all of humanity to praise Him. Jesus Christ is the one who makes all things new.

We normally have the human form of Jesus firmly fixed in our minds, and when we hear that glorious and exalted name, it is this human form that we tend to mentally reflect on. But Jesus Christ is also fully God and He is the "image of the invisible God." In other words, all of the glory of God is revealed through the Person of Jesus Christ. Every good and wonderful thing we see with our eyes came from God, and it is therefore only a minute reflection of the infinite glory of our Creator – the Creator who is our eternally glorious and worthy Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May we never fail to remember that He is wholly worthy of our glory, honor, and thanks. He is great. He is glorious. He is JESUS.

What an amazing and glorious King of the Universe is revealed to us in the pages of the book of Revelation. If the heavenly creatures stand in awe of the splendor of the Lord, how much more should we. Let us never forget that the One who washed the dirty feet of the disciples is also the Lord of all Creation. He is Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen!

the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:
Revelation 4:10

The verse here should be taken together with the previous verse, but – like the previous verse – all of the verbs are actually in the future tense. They will be underlined to reflect this –

> "Whenever the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders shall fall down before Him who sits on the throne and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying:"
>
> -Revelation 4:9, 10

At the intervals where the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the Lord, John tells us that "the twenty-four elders [shall] fall down before Him who sits on the throne." As Ellicott says, "The future tense (shall give glory, &c.) implies the eternal repetition of the act." And again, as Bengel states, "Each future expresses a simultaneous act of giving of glory on the part of the beasts and on the part of the elders: and, at the same time, it has a frequentative force: *As often as the beasts give glory, immediately the elders fall*."

It is to be noted that the homage paid by the twenty-four elders is directed to the same One as is the glory and honor and thanks given by the beasts. Both verses refer to "Him who sits on the throne." The four beasts (symbolically representing the four gospels) direct their worship toward Jesus Christ. He is the one on display throughout them. The twenty-four elders (the heavenly government and worship) respond in accord with the attention focused on by the gospels.

In other words, what the gospels proclaim and call out for in glory, honor, and thanks is then confirmed by the heavenly government in worship as well. Jesus Christ is the God/Man who possesses all authority in heaven and on earth, and all worship is to be directed to Him. Understanding this, John next says, "and worship Him who lives forever and ever."

Again, the same phrase is repeated from the previous verse. The gospels testify to the eternality of Christ, and the heavenly government and worship are directed to this One who is eternal. Everything centers on the fact that Christ is this eternal being. As He said

in Revelation 1:18, “I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen.”
It is He who came from the eternal realm, it is He who prevailed over death, and it is He who lives forevermore. This is testified to in the gospels, and this is what is acknowledged by the heavenly government. Because of this, the response of the elders is that they “cast their crowns before the throne.” What they will say is found in the coming verse. For now, the note of them casting their crowns signifies that this is understood and acknowledged as such.

The casting of these royal crowns signifies that the honor of the heavenly authority belongs to the One on the throne. There is the sense of humiliation before the King. No creature, even the heavenly government, possesses any glory apart from Him, and to Him it alone belongs.

Life application: The elders in this verse have been given golden crowns, signifying their right and authority to rule, but they defer the honor to the One who seated them. In like manner, Jesus is the One who bought each person back from a state of spiritual deadness and restored to him the blessing of eternal life. Therefore, whatever crowns we shall possess are gracious bestowals from a gracious King. In the end, any honor we possess – from now and throughout all eternity – is because it was granted to us by the Lord.

In all ways, what we have comes from Him. He gave us life as the Creator, He gave us freedom from the law as our Redeemer, He gave us the power to grow in holiness as the One who sanctifies us, and He has given us the future promise of glorification.

Jesus was there at the beginning, He is here now, and – being eternal – He will always be before us. Some commentaries state that the One on the throne to whom the elders cast their crowns is God the Father, but as noted before (and as will be noted again in the coming chapters) Jesus is the One who reveals the unseen God. Therefore, every manifestation of God that we see is Jesus (the Son) continuously revealing what the Father has ordained.

Lord God, we stand amazed at who You are and in what You have done. The marvel and intricacy of the universe displays Your glory, and yet You were willing to unite with humanity in Christ, lowering Your station to redeem us from our sins. How can such love exist? What is it about man that brought this to pass? Our hearts are full of wonder at Your workings, O God. Amen.

“You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.” Revelation 4:11

The words here are those uttered by the twenty-four elders noted in the previous verse. When the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the One on the throne, the elders fall down before Him in worship, cast their crowns before the throne, and utter these words, beginning with, “You are worthy, O Lord.”

Here, some manuscripts say, “our Lord and our God,” instead of “O Lord.” Others say, “the Holy One.” Despite the variations, the attention is focused on the One on the throne. This is Christ Jesus – fully God and fully Man. He is worthy because He is God. As such, it is right and proper that He “receive glory and honor and power.”

It is true that there are heretics who deny the deity of Christ, and thus deny that He is the one being referred to. However, the contents of this verse, and those of verses ahead in Chapter 5, will refute that notion.

First, the words here change from those of verse 4:9, which said, “glory and honor and thanks.” Instead, “thanks” is changed to “power.” God has all power. And yet, here it is said that the one on the throne receives power. That is reflective of the words of Matthew 28:18, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

With authority comes the power to exercise that authority. Likewise, Paul says in Ephesians 1 –

> “which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places,* **21** far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” Ephesians 1:20, 21

The idea here is that the humanity of Christ is exalted above all things in the creation that He in His deity created. He never stopped being God, and yet in the incarnation, He united with creation in order to redeem. That will be seen in Chapter 5. For now, the focus is on the creative aspect of God in Christ. As it next says, “For You created all things.”

The New Testament evidence of Christ the Creator is overwhelming. But two citations are enough –

> "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." John 1:1-3

> "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." Colossians 1:15, 16

Understanding that God in Christ is the Creator, the elders next proclaim, "And by Your will they exist and were created." Here, the creation is said to "exist." The verb is in the imperfect tense. It is a way of saying that a state of existence (or an action) was still going on in the past. As Cambridge translates and explains it, "Read they were: not exactly 'they came into being,' but 'they had their being.'"

In the fact that these things came into existence by Him, and because they still exist now, it indicates that not only were they created, but they continue to be sustained by Him. In other words, there is implied in the doxology the thought of continuance. That is reflected in what is said of Christ Jesus in these verses –

> "And *he* is before all, and all things subsist together by him." Colossians 1:17 (Darby)

> "who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Hebrews 1:3

It is God in Christ Jesus that accomplished the creative effort, and it is He who continues to sustain the creation now and forever. As the Creator, He is before all things, and therefore all things owe Him the acknowledgment of this. We are wholly dependent on His will, and to Him alone is praise and honor and glory and power to be ascribed.

<u>Life application:</u> As noted above, this verse forms the first doxology of praise from the twenty-four elders, and it encompasses the concept of creation. In the next chapter, there will be a doxology referring to redemption.

These same concepts form the reason for the fourth of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and then in Deuteronomy 5. Further, they are given in the same order. Thus,

these doxologies are tying the Lord (Jesus) of Revelation in with the Lord (Yehovah) of the Old Testament. He is the Creator, and He is the Redeemer.
Reviewing those verses will show us this –

> "For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." Exodus 20:11

> "And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."
> -Deuteronomy 5:15

Jesus is the One who was there at the beginning – "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). If He created these things, then He was there before they came to exist. He created what is from what was not (creation ex nihilo) and therefore He was before they came to be. Everything was in His mind and then He spoke it all into existence. Because of this, everything belongs to Him and the purpose of His act of creation is to bring Himself glory.

And not only did He create all things, but He is currently and continuously sustaining all things. Man doesn't need the Bible to understand the necessity of a Creator and a Sustainer. These concepts can be thought through, understood, and supported by reason and intellect alone.

Once these things are grasped, then all mankind needs to do is to search out where this infinite Mind has revealed Himself. There is only one text that accurately defines what we can know about this glorious Creator – the Holy Bible. Reason alone excludes all other religions and religious texts on earth and confirms the God of the Bible as the One true God. Jesus Christ is the full, complete, and only proper revelation of this Creator. He is the Lord God Almighty… He is JESUS.

Oh God! To plumb the depth and riches of Your word, the Holy Bible, is something that we will be able to do forever. There is no end to the wisdom and beauty of what You have given us in its pages. You are worthy, O God, to receive glory, and honor, and praise, and power. Amen!

CHAPTER 5

And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Revelation 5:1

Chapter 5 begins with a scene that reveals an instance that was previously described in Chapter 4. There it said –

> "Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne..." Revelation 4:9, 10

As noted then, the word "Whenever" signifies "at the time when the condition is met." Thus, this doesn't indicate a rote form of worship, but rather it comes at different occasions. Also, it indicates that it occurs periodically but continuously. All of Chapter 5 is such a scene, fulfilling the meaning of "whenever." This is seen in the last verse of Chapter 5 –

> "Then the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever" (5:14).

Understanding this, the heavenly scene begins with, "And I saw in the right *hand* of Him." The Greek reads epi, or upon. "And I saw upon the right *hand* of Him." One can think of someone with a scroll in their hand. As an offer to another to take it, the hand is extended forward, and the fingers relax from holding it. Thus, it is now "upon" the hand and offered without restraint.

The imagery of this is important for what will continue to be said in this heavenly scene. That which is offered is open and accessible to be taken. This is in the hand of the One "who sat on the throne." This is God in Christ making an offer available to be taken. There is nothing from His aspect that will restrain what is in His hand. The scroll is upon the hand, and all that needs to happen is for someone to take it.

And that which is offered is "a scroll written inside and on the back." This scroll is what is known in the times of John as an opisthograph, meaning a scroll written on both sides. This is reflective of what is stated in Ezekiel 2 –

> "Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book *was* in it. **10** Then He spread it before me; and *there was* writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it *were* lamentations and mourning and woe." Ezekiel 2:9, 10

For other options besides this being an opisthograph, and for some of the possible meanings of what this scroll is, Reading Acts provides a detailed analysis of it at this link.

Of this scroll, it then says that it is "sealed with seven seals." Of this arrangement, Vincent's Word Studies notes –

"Sealed (κατεσφραγισμένον). Only here in the New Testament. The preposition κατά denotes sealed down. So Rev., close sealed. The roll is wound round a staff and fastened down to it with the seven seals. The unrolling of the parchment is nowhere indicated in the vision. Commentators have puzzled themselves to explain the arrangement of the seals, so as to admit of the unrolling of a portion with the opening of each seal."

In the link provided above from Reading Acts, several viewpoints on what the scroll and what its contents signify are given. The important point to consider is not merely the seals themselves, nor what is written upon the scroll, but equally so is what is stated about it here in Chapter 5. In taking in what is said concerning it here, the symbolism becomes evident.

This is especially so in the doxology of praise found in verses 5:9, 10. It explains what is contained within the scroll, and its significance goes back to the Garden of Eden itself, but the typology is beautifully revealed in the book of Ruth. To understand that book, and what it is typologically picturing, you are invited to watch the 13-part series (written or on YouTube) presented by the Superior Word. In understanding that, the contents of the scroll are made clear. In short, and as an acceptable explanation, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown states –

"The roll, or book, appears from the context to be 'the title-deed of man's inheritance' [De Burgh] redeemed by Christ, and contains the successive steps by which He shall recover it from its usurper and obtain actual possession of the kingdom already 'purchased' for Himself and His elect saints. However, no portion of the roll is said to be unfolded and read; but simply the seals are successively opened, giving final access to its contents being read as a perfect whole, which shall not be until the events symbolized by the seals shall have been past, when Eph 3:10 shall receive its complete accomplishment, and the Lamb shall reveal God's providential plans in redemption in all their manifold beauties. Thus the opening of the seals will mean the successive steps by

which God in Christ clears the way for the final opening and reading of the book at the visible setting up of the kingdom of Christ."

Life application: As noted, the One seated on the throne – the Lord God Almighty, is Jesus. It is He who continuously reveals the unseen God to us. As we continue, other representations of Him will be interacting with each other, but all of them are Jesus. There is no contradiction here. Rather, each is simply one aspect or another of God revealing Himself to us through Him.

The scroll being in the right hand of the One on throne signifies the position of authority. It is where Jesus rules from (see Acts 2:33 for example). This indicates that He has the authority over what is in the scroll. The scroll is "written inside and on the back." Normally, scrolls only had writing on one side, especially if they were papyrus scrolls. This is because of the way they were made. The pen used for writing would easily catch on the vertical cracks of the back side of a scroll. This scroll then is of great importance because John specifically notes that it has writing on both sides.

Concerning the scrolls, ancient Roman wills were sealed with seven seals, and this is certainly what is being referred to here – a will or title deed. A parallel from the Old Testament comes from Jeremiah 32 where Jeremiah is told to purchase land and the deed is recorded on a scroll –

> "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Take these deeds, both this purchase deed which is sealed and this deed which is open, and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may last many days.'" Jeremiah 32:14

This account occurred when the land of Israel would be lost due to their rebellion and the forces of evil Babylon would take control of it. But Jeremiah was given a sure promise –

> "For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.'" Jeremiah 32:15

Just as fallen man lost the right to the title deed of the land he was given, Jesus regained that right, having purchased it with His own death after fulfilling the Law in Himself (the earthen Vessel where the law was kept). "For where there *is* a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. Hebrews 9:16

O God! That You had a plan, even from the very beginning to restore us to Paradise through the life, death, and resurrection of Your own precious Son, our Lord Jesus – it is

beyond marvelous. He came and dwelt in an earthen vessel so that we might be reconciled to You. How amazing are Your ways, O God. Glory to You in the highest! Amen.

Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" Revelation 5:2

A scroll has just been openly presented to whoever could take it from the hand of the One seated on the throne. This was certain because it was "on" His right hand. Thus, it could be taken without hindrance. But now, a caveat is brought into the heavenly scene. John says, "Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice."

This angel may, likewise, be a presentation of Christ Jesus. The reason this is so is that the word *aggelos*, or "angel," simply means "a messenger." The word corresponds directly to the Hebrew word for messenger which is used when speaking of the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, including that of Jesus – the *malak*, or "Messenger" – in Malachi 3:1 –

> "'Behold, I send My messenger,
> And he will prepare the way before Me.
> And the Lord, whom you seek,
> Will suddenly come to His temple,
> Even the Messenger of the covenant,
> In whom you delight.
> Behold, He is coming,'
> Says the LORD of hosts."

There, the same word is speaking first of John the Baptist – "My messenger" – and then of Christ Jesus – "the Messenger of the covenant." The reason this "angel" may be another revelation of Christ is because of the description of another angel in Revelation 10:1-4 that reflects the attributes of the Lord. However, as nothing more is said of this messenger here, it could simply be a created angel that makes proclamations before the Lord, such as the angel Gabriel.

And, indeed, it has been surmised that this is the angel Gabriel who has been the bearer of God's revelation to certain people throughout redemptive history. He specifically appeared to Daniel, Zechariah, and Mary, and may have appeared at other times as an unnamed herald of God's message. Gabriel means something like "mighty one of God," and this would fit the description here of a "strong angel." The matter, either way, stands as speculative.

What is of great importance is what this angel proclaims with his loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" The idea here is of moral entitlement. Who is morally fit to open the scrolls? This is reflective of John the Baptist's statement in John 1 –

> "John answered them, saying, 'I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. **27** It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.'" John 1:27, 28

The reason it is certain this speaks of moral entitlement is because the offer is made from the Most Holy One sitting upon the throne. He is pure and undefiled, and in Him is only righteousness, justice, and holiness. As this offer is made from Him, anyone that approaches Him must be, likewise, in such a pure and undefiled state.

The offer is made. Who, if any, will come forward to accept it?

Life application: In the previous verse, we were introduced to the scroll sealed with seven seals in the "right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne." This scroll had writing on both sides and is the will or title deed to which Adam lost the right when he disobeyed God. Since that time there have been many billions of humans on the earth. The question is now put forth asking if any are found worthy to come forward, accept it, and open its seals. Is anyone who has lived since Adam qualified to restore and accept responsibility for that which he willfully lost?

The words are waiting to be unsealed. This implies that they were at one point sealed, that they have been sealed since then, and that someone is expected to unseal them at some point. In Daniel 12:9 there is a parallel thought concerning sealed words – "And he said, 'Go *your way,* Daniel, for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end.'"

This statement was precipitated by the following words –

> "At that time Michael shall stand up,
> The great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people;
> And there shall be a time of trouble,
> Such as never was since there was a nation,
> *Even* to that time.
> And at that time your people shall be delivered,
> Every one who is found written in the book.
> **2** And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,

Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.
3 Those who are wise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever." Daniel 12:1-3

Daniel was told about the events of a coming day that would be centered on the nation of Israel, but which would encompass the entire world in mass destruction. This time is known as the Tribulation Period, and it comes more clearly into focus throughout the rest of the Bible…if only someone is worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals. Stay tuned.

Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals? Lord, we – Your people – know that we are not. Where Adam failed, we continue to fail. We have come short of Your holiness and have not been perfect. But thank You, O God, that our sins are covered by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We know that because of Him, our sins are forgiven. Thank You, O God, for Jesus! Amen.

And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. Revelation 5:3

The scroll has been presented (5:1) and the call has gone forth, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" (5:2). With that accomplished, the answer is given. John mournfully says, "And no one in heaven." The Greek contains an article, "And no one in the heaven."

This means that in the highest heaven, even those with direct access to the throne of God, none is found worthy. This would include Enoch and Elijah who were both translated to heaven, and who minister before the Lord as is revealed in Zechariah 4 –

"I am looking, and there *is* a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the *stand* seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. **3** Two olive trees *are* by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left."
-Zechariah 4:2, 3

"These *are* the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth." Zechariah 4:14

This would also exclude even the great angels that stood before the Lord, such as Gabriel –

> "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. **20** But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." Luke 1:19, 20

These, and any other beings who occupy positions in the heaven, are found to be not worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals. As a point of doctrine, the KJV says, "And no man in heaven." Saying, "no man," instead of "no one" or "none," could leave open the door for the allowance of Mary being considered a co-redemptrix as argued for by certain cults (such as the RCC). Using "no one" will also avoid any error of theology concerning angels being qualified. It will also ensure that the state of Christ, being the God/Man is understood as such.

Next, John says, "or on the earth." No being on the earth is found worthy. As this is a heavenly scene, time is irrelevant. From Adam until the last human to be conceived within the stream of time, none are found worthy who dwell upon the earth. This is confirmed in the next words, saying, "or under the earth."

This would be speaking of Hades (or Sheol of the Old Testament Hebrew). It is the place where the souls of the dead go. In that place, none are found worthy who have ever existed. Their lives were lived, they died, and they were set to remain in Hades for all eternity, unable to undo what Adam had done. As John says, "no one was able to open the scroll."

The word translated as "able," signifies having power, and thus ability. Even the most noble person, the most moral person, or the most intelligent person who ever existed would still not have the sufficient power to come forth into the presence of God and undo what had been done to cause the scroll to be rolled up and sealed. And further, John adds in the final words of the verse, "or to look at it."

These words signify total unworthiness. Not only could they not take it into their hand, nor loose its seals, but they were unworthy to even take a momentary glance at the scroll. The state of either positional or moral unworthiness of all beings in creation excluded their even looking at it. Angels, for example, may be morally qualified, but their position as spirits excludes them. Humans may be positionally qualified, being of the seed of Adam, but their moral state as fallen beings who have inherited original sin excludes them. None are found worthy.

Life application:

1) *No one in heaven* – No human being who has ever lived and who is currently in the heavenly realms is qualified. Enoch, the seventh man from Adam, was translated directly to heaven because he "walked with God" – unworthy. Elijah, the great prophet of Israel, also went directly to heaven in a chariot of fire – unworthy. No angel in heaven as well. Due to their state in creation – unworthy.

2) *No one on the earth* – Think of the people on the earth today who you may admire. Billy Graham – unworthy; the US president – Unworthy; some other noted pastor or politician – unworthy; you – unworthy; me – unworthy. Repeat this for the other 7 billion people on earth – all unworthy.

3) *No one under the earth* – Every human who has ever existed since the creation of Adam and who is now resting in the dust from which they came… just think about it! Great men of God; great world leaders; missionaries; evangelists; heroes of the Bible – all unworthy.

   And not only are all unable to open the scroll, we aren't even worthy to look at it.

All humans have inherited Adam's sin directly in three ways: Legally – we are legally in Adam because He is our federal head. Potentially – the very fact that we *could exist* as human beings brings us into direct contact with Adam. Seminally – all humans who *actually exist* (from the very moment of conception) are stained with Adam's sin, having inherited it as a result of the fall. Death, which is the wages of sin, proves this. Even infant babies aren't excluded.

As an important note, this verse disproves the immaculate conception of Mary. If Mary were born and had remained in a sinless state, then she would be worthy. But no one, including Mary the mother of Jesus, is worthy. This frightening passage should leave all of us humbled. We have no claim to boast before God because we are unworthy.

Lord, when we get thinking too highly of ourselves, simply looking into Your word reminds us that we are unworthy – wholly and completely. Our very existence testifies against us and we stand condemned. That You would send Jesus to cleanse us has all the more significance when we see our own fallen state. Thank You, O God, for Jesus. Amen.

So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. Revelation 5:4

In response to finding that none were worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals, John literally burst into tears. As he says, “So I wept much.”

In the Greek, the pronoun is emphatic, and the verb is in the imperfect tense. One might say, “And I, even I, just kept weeping exceedingly.” When he realized the state of man before the holiness of God, he understood the eternal disconnect that stood between the two. What seems like an easy walk in the presence of God while on the earth is found to be a catastrophic, unhealable wound when standing before Him in heaven. As such, John wept uncontrollably “because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll.”

The contents of the book are hidden from the eyes of all men. Not even one is worthy to reclaim the inheritance lost by Adam. Thus, only life in a fallen world, followed by death and separation from God, is the result. The contents of the scroll are to remain forever out of the reach of the fallen sons of Adam. So great is this barrier that John finishes the thought with, “or to look at it.”

Not only are all unworthy of opening and reading the scroll, not even a momentary glance will ever be offered. Even the most pious, humble, God-fearing man who ever lived will be denied a mere glance at the contents of the scroll. The infection of sin precludes even this. Woe to man without God’s Christ.

Life application: John was overwhelmed at the reality of what he was being presented with through this heavenly vision. He had been told in verse 4:1, “I will show you things which must take place after this.” But now that he was in the heavenly throne room, it appeared that what must take place is simply eternal condemnation for all humanity.

The effects of sin permeated every person who was ever born. Only a sinless being would be qualified to replace the failings of Adam… but no one came forward. No one else was worthy. Even John who was “in the Spirit” (4:2) wasn’t found worthy. But John, in his overwhelming grief, had forgotten the glory of what Christ came to do. He was so consumed with the misery of fallen humanity, that anguish was all he could feel. And yet, the words of Paul as recorded in Philippians 2:9-11, tell us of the glory John had momentarily forgotten –

> “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, **11** and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

> There is a name that is above every other name and One to which all of creation will bow. This One came and fulfilled the Law on behalf of Adam's seed. Being born of a virgin, he didn't inherit sin as other humans do. He is, therefore, qualified to face the devil head-on. He prevailed where Adam had failed and so He can now speak on behalf of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth. Don't weep John; there is an answer to your immense grief. He is coming and His name is Jesus. Philippians 2:9-11

That Name above every other name fills our souls with joy. When we think on our sin and fallen state, we can also look around and see that everyone else is just like everyone else. We all fall short of Your glory, O God. And it makes knowing Jesus all the more precious. In all of human history, only One has gone without sin, and it is to Him that we shall direct our praise, honor, and thanks. He is Jesus. Amen.

But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."
Revelation 5:5

John, overcome with anguish at the unworthiness of all created beings, and their inability to open the scroll or even to look at it, is now given the greatest of encouragements. While standing there and mourning, it says, "But one of the elders said to me. Do not weep."

The identity of the elder is not stated, and it is thus irrelevant. The various possibilities of who these elders are were evaluated in verse 4:4. Regardless as to his identity, he is aware of something that John needed to know. And what that is contrasts to the state of mournful emotion that John was overwhelmed with – "Do not weep." If the unworthiness of those in creation to open the scroll is what brought John to his current state, then the words "Do not weep" must provide a remedy to that state.

And so, he conveys the most magnificent of words to the mournful apostle, beginning with, "Behold, the Lion." The lion is used at times as a symbol of kingly authority in Scripture, such as in Ezekiel 32:2 (and elsewhere) –

> "Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him:
> 'You are like a young lion among the nations,
> And you *are* like a monster in the seas,
> Bursting forth in your rivers,
> Troubling the waters with your feet,
> And fouling their rivers.'"

Further, the Lord (Yehovah) of the Old Testament is equated to a lion in Jeremiah 25:38 (and elsewhere) –

> "He has left His lair like the lion;
> For their land is desolate
> Because of the fierceness of the Oppressor,
> And because of His fierce anger."

But more to the point, the words of this elder are certainly tying the title ascribed here in Revelation to the prophecy made in Genesis 49 concerning the coming Messiah –

> "Judah *is* a lion's whelp;
> From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
> He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
> And as a lion, who shall rouse him?
> **10** The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
> Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
> Until Shiloh comes;
> And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people." Genesis 49:9-10

Understanding this symbolism, the elder continues with, "of the tribe of Judah." This clearly identifies the One being spoken of as the fulfillment of the prophecy from Genesis 49. It then ties in with other messianic prophecies seen in the Old Testament, such as the promise of an everlasting throne being bestowed upon the line of David in 2 Samuel 7. It is to Judah that these great promises were made. Thus, this Lion of the Tribe of Judah is the fulfillment of those prophecies.

He is further described as "the Root of David." This term is wrongly applied by scholars to say that Christ is a root which springs out of David. This is incorrect. A root is the basis for what springs out of it. A seed first goes down into the soil to find anchoring and moisture. From there, the roots are established, and the plant then proceeds upward.

Elsewhere, the Messiah is called a Branch, signifying One who would come from a plant, extending out. This would be a descendant. In this case, however, the Root refers to One who comes before. Thus, not only does this One descend from Judah (and obviously from David who was given the kingly promises), but He is the Source of David – the Root. This is confirmed later in Revelation 22 where Christ says He is both "the Root and the Offspring of David." It is what is referred to in Matthew 22 –

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, [42] saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"
They said to Him, "*The Son* of David."
[43] He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying:
[44] 'The LORD said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool" '?
[45] If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" [46] And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.
-Matthew 22:41-46

Jesus was showing that not only was the Christ to come from David, but He is also the Creator of David. It is of this One that the elder then says that He "has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

Here, in these words, the fifth chapter of Revelation corresponds to the fifth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The fifth letter, *he*, signifies "to reveal." The opening of the scroll will reveal its contents. The One referred to by the elder "has prevailed." The Greek word signifies to overcome, overpower, stand victorious. It is a word that implies the fighting of a battle. This One has been in a battle, and He has prevailed (see Revelation 3:21). In His prevailing, He has earned the right "to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

That which was sealed and inaccessible can now be made manifest. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has been found worthy!

Life application: What appeared to be a loss for humanity has become a victory – but only because of the intervention of God. The incarnation of Jesus Christ was the only hope for man because all men are conceived in sin through Adam, receiving his fallen nature. All of the other beings in creation – be they spirit or animal – are in a different category, and they are unworthy to accomplish for man what man had to do.

And so, Jesus came through a woman (He is fully Man) and by the Holy Spirit (He is fully God). In this, He did not inherit Adam's sin. He was qualified to accomplish the task set before Him. From there, the gospel shows that He was also capable of doing so. He was born sinless, and He lived without ever sinning. In this, He prevailed. He is the great King. He is JESUS!

Lord, when things seem out of control in our lives and we are at our moment of greatest sadness and despair, You are there and in complete control. What have we to fear when

You have gained the victory? You not only conquered death and defeated the devil, but You have promised to include us in Your great plan for the ages to come. Praises belong to You alone, O God. Amen!

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Revelation 5:6

In the previous verse, John heard the voice say, "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." Expecting to see a kingly figure when he raised his eyes from weeping, it says, "And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures."

Remembering the symbolism of the four living creatures, that of them representing the four aspects of Christ in the four gospels, one can mentally prepare for what is being depicted in this heavenly scene. Then John continues, saying, "and in the midst of the elders." As noted in verse 4:4, these twenty-four elders signify heavenly government and worship. Again, this helps us to understand what will next be said. In the midst of the presentation of the four gospels, and in the midst of the heavenly government and worship, there "stood a Lamb as though it had been slain."

Here, the word translated as "stood" is a perfect participle. It should say, "standing." There is standing a Lamb, and yet it is as if it had been slain. The words are paradoxical. How can a Lamb be standing despite being as if it had been slain?

But this is the point. The focal point of everything presented in the gospels presented to man on earth, and the focal point of all governmental attention in the heavenly realm, is... a Lamb as if it had been slain. A moment before, He had been heralded as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and yet John sees a Lamb "as though it had been slain."

The word translated as "Lamb" is the diminutive form of a sheep, thus it is a little lamb. There are two aspects to this then. The first is innocence. In the sacrificial system of Israel, this was what was required for the Passover lamb –

> "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year." Exodus 12:5

Further, the same thing is said of the twice-daily offering at the tabernacle/temple –

> "Now this *is* what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. **39** One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight." Exodus 29:38, 39

Being of the first year, there is conveyed the idea of innocence. It is weak, cannot protect itself, and would normally anticipate each new day ahead as it continued to follow its mother along innocently. However, the description of the Lamb in John's vision is an innocent Lamb "as though it had been slain." The word translated as "slain" is *sphazó*. It signifies butchery for food or sacrifice.

Here, the Lamb is seen to have been sacrificed. The two thoughts together anticipate that an innocent lamb used for Israel's sacrificial system was given in anticipation of the coming work of the Messiah. This Lamb in Revelation, then, is the fulfillment of those anticipatory pictures.

The focus of both the heavenly government and the earthly witness of God's dealings with man is directed to this Lamb that was as if it had been sacrificed. And of this Lamb, John says it is "having seven horns and seven eyes."

In the Old Testament, the horn comes from the word *qeren*. That is from the verb *qaran*, signifying "to send out rays," meaning "to shine." This then conveys the idea of prominence, exaltation, and strength. And this is how the horn is used in 2 Samuel (and elsewhere) –

> "The LORD *is* my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;
> **3** The God of my strength, in whom I will trust;
> My shield and the horn of my salvation,
> My stronghold and my refuge;
> My Savior, You save me from violence." 2 Samuel 2:22:2, 3

The eye, or in Hebrew *ayin*, is that which is outflowing, and thus that which gives appearance. For example, a spring or fountain is called "an eye" because it is where water issues forth from. Using this idea of appearance, the eye is used along with many descriptors – "an evil eye," "a bountiful eye," "the lust of the eyes," "eyes full of adultery," and so on.

In this case, the appearance of the Lamb is that of innocence and substitutionary death which is radiated out in power and exaltation.

Seven is the number of spiritual perfection (completeness). John takes these two things together, horns and eyes, and says that they "are the seven Spirits of God." These seven spirits of God reflect His perfect power, exaltation, and appearance. In other words, this Lamb reflects those attributes of God perfectly. In His being a Lamb – innocent, and in His being slain -substitutionary death, these attributes of God are perfectly revealed.

One can see a reflection of what the Lord said to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 – "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Just as Christ's strength is made perfect in weakness," through the apostle, the perfection of God's strength is displayed in the humility of Christ, the Lamb. It is this depiction of Christ by which the seven Spirits of God are "sent out into all the earth."

It is the innocence (sinlessness) and death of Christ by which God has most purposefully revealed Himself. Despite all of the power, wonder, and majesty of the created order, the highest representation of Himself, in all of time and in all of His handiwork, is in the innocent crucified Christ.

Life application: The scroll which is to be opened is a will or title deed and as was previously noted, Hebrews 9:16 says, "…where there *is* a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator." Jesus Christ gave up His perfect life to establish the New Covenant and to regain the title deed to fallen humanity.

The scroll which is to be opened will contain judgments upon the world, and the One who opens it will be the executor of those judgments. When they come, the people of the world will not be able to ask why the executor isn't also participating in these judgments. His scars testify that He already has. He already took the judgments that the world can now expect, and He prevailed over what He was given.

He gave His life in the task before Him and, being sinless, He was resurrected. Those who call on Him will likewise be given eternal life. Those who don't will receive what they deserve for rejecting His gracious offer.

The slain lamb that comes forward has "seven horns and seven eyes." These are explained as being "the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth."

In verse 4:5, we read, "Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." In other words, these "seven Spirits of God" that burned before the throne – illuminating the splendor of God – have now become the active agents of the Lamb that will go forth in judgment.

The eyes see every hidden thing and the horns will execute the judgment upon the unrepentant world. This Lamb will no longer be the meek and mild suffering Servant. He will become the One who comes to bring destruction on all who have rejected Him. He is the Lion and the Lamb. He is Jesus.

Lord God, when we think on the slain Lamb, innocent and spotless, standing in the heavenly throne, we can't help but praise You. In humility and kindness, You came to this world, and in love, You have offered peace and restoration. And yet the world has mocked, ridiculed, and rejected You. Surely, You are righteous in the judgments to come. Amen.

Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Revelation 5:7

In the Greek, there is a changing of the tenses of the verbs which is skipped by most translations, and yet it makes the entire scene much more graphic. The Greek goes from the aorist to the perfect tense –

> "And He came, and He has taken the scroll out of the right hand of Him who is sitting on the throne."

With this understood, it can be analyzed more precisely. John begins with, "And He came." One can imagine anyone approved to do so coming before the throne, just as is seen in any royal setting. For example, Esther was granted permission to stand before King Ahasuerus in the book of Esther –

> "Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. **4** And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king." Esther 8:3, 4

In this heavenly scene of Revelation 5, the Lamb came before the One on the throne. He has been granted this royal privilege. But there is a specific reason for His approach. It next says, "and He has taken the scroll."

One can see the definitive nature of the act. Not only did the Lamb come forward, but when He came, He is shown to be worthy. The completed and definitive act of receiving the scroll – has taken – demonstrates that it occurred, and it is fully accomplished. Worthy is the Lamb!

At this point, some scholars devolve into over-speculation of what is being presented – "How can a Lamb that doesn't have hands take a scroll." From this, all kinds of fanciful analyses are whipped up and presented as tasty treats for the reader to consider. Such things are wholly unnecessary. John is using apocalyptic terminology, but that terminology is used to reveal the many aspects of Christ Jesus.

We are not to get bogged down in what is not said, but to mentally consider what is said. Christ is as a Lion. He is as a Lamb. He is the One on the throne. And so on. God is revealing Himself through His Christ, but the account is using apocalyptic symbolism to convey aspects of Him. A lamb, for example, speaks of innocence. A slain lamb speaks of sacrifice. The innocence and the sacrifice are what have made His coming forward and taking the scroll possible. Getting bogged down in unnecessary speculation is what will cause the reader to miss the overall point of what is being portrayed.

Next, this innocent One who was sacrificed (but who is obviously alive), is said to take the scroll "out of the right hand." As has been seen, the right hand is the position of power and authority. Again, as cited before, this looks back to Jesus' own words at the end of the book of Matthew –

> "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.' Amen." Matthew 28:18-20

The scroll in the right hand has transferred from "Him who sat on the throne" to the Lamb who died and yet rose again. This is exactingly explained by Paul in Philippians 2 –

> "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, **7** but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. **9** Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, **11** and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
>
> -Philippians 2:5-11

God has returned this title deed to Himself through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He is the One on the throne, and He is the Lamb that was slain. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is on full view in this heavenly scene.

We can see that what is presented in Revelation 5 is a similar expression to what was already presented to Israel in Daniel 7 –

> "I was watching in the night visions,
> And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
> Coming with the clouds of heaven!
> He came to the Ancient of Days,
> And they brought Him near before Him.
> **14** Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
> That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
> His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
> Which shall not pass away,
> And His kingdom *the one*
> Which shall not be destroyed." Daniel 7:13, 14

Life application: The right to receive and to open the scroll has been given to the Lion of the tribe of Judah who is the King of kings, and the right has been given to the Lamb of God who fulfilled the law on behalf of fallen man and then paid the penalty for their sins at the Cross of Calvary. His blood was shed as a substitution for those who are willing to accept Him. The guilt is transferred, and the sins are removed; the righteousness is thus transferred from God to man.

Jesus has won the victory and gained the right to the title deed and He has paid the price for those who call on Him. He offers mercy based on His paying this price, and He has provided the grace by exalting all who accept the call. The choice is made and now the scroll can be opened. When it is, the entire earth will be affected by the result. Get ready, big events are on the horizon. The Lion has prevailed, and the Lamb has been found worthy. He is great, and He is glorious. He is JESUS!

All hail the great and exalted name of Jesus. He is the Lord God Almighty who rules the universe; He is the Lion of Judah who rules the earth; He is the Lamb of God who provides atonement for His people; and He is the One to open the scroll and let loose judgment upon an unrepentant world. He is Jesus – Hallelujah and Amen… He is Jesus!

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. Revelation 5:8

In the previous verse, the Lamb came forward and had taken the scroll out of the right hand of the One who sat on the throne. From there, John continues the scene. He says, "Now when He had taken the scroll."

The verb reverts to the aorist tense here and should say, "Now when He took the scroll." This is the moment of victory. The Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed, and He did it in the form of an innocent, slain Lamb. Through death, the victory has been obtained and the right to the scroll has been obtained. With this, "the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb."

The act signifies worship. Normally it would be a fully prostrate position. However, the next words would seem to preclude that. Either way, they fall down before the Lamb in "glory and honor and thanks" (verse 4:9). This then explains the meaning of the word "whenever" in 4:9. At such a marvelous moment, such as now with the Lamb taking the scroll, the words of that verse come to pass.

The symbolism of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders falling down is that of 1) the gospel message (the four living creatures, thus signifying any who have received it) and 2) all of the heavenly government (symbolized by the twenty-four elders). In this, they acknowledge the Lamb for His glorious achievement.

John next says of them (probably only meaning the twenty-four elders), "each having a harp." The word is *kithara*. The word is found only in 1 Corinthians 14:7 and three times in Revelation. Vincent's Word Studies explains it –

"Κιθάρα harp signifies an instrument unlike our harp as ordinarily constructed. Rather a lute or guitar, to which latter word kithara is etymologically related. Anciently of a triangular shape, with seven strings, afterwards increased to eleven. Josephus says it had ten, and was played with a plectrum or small piece of ivory."

The word is the root of our modern word "guitar." These are not the harps of David's time, known as *gittiyth* and *kinor*. Nor are they the Greek style of lyres. Instead, these are more closely associated in sound and style with guitars. In the Bible, harps and similar instruments are seen in connection with service to God, prophesying, and so on. The harps here would be used in connection with the worship and praise of the Lamb. Next, John says, "and golden bowls full of incense."

The word is *phialé*. One can see the etymological root of the word vial in it, but the word vial as is used today does not convey the idea of what is being seen. Rather, it signifies a shallow, flat bowl. The incense in these vessels is then explained for us, saying, "which are the prayers of the saints."

Because the incense is explained here, there is no need to go beyond this to find any other meaning. However, the symbolism is also explained in this manner elsewhere –

> "LORD, I cry out to You;
> Make haste to me!
> Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You.
> **2** Let my prayer be set before You *as* incense,
> The lifting up of my hands *as* the evening sacrifice." Psalm 141:1, 2

Life application: Until now, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders have fallen down before the One on the throne – the eternally existent God and Creator of all things, who is Jesus. But now it says they "fell down before the Lamb." Jesus is God united with human flesh. This will always be so. He will never cease to be other than the God/Man. As such, it is to Him that our attention, thoughts, allegiance, and worship are to be directed. This is the point of the symbolism we have been given. Jesus has prevailed!

As a point of doctrine, the symbolism of the incense representing the "prayers of the saints," it is important to understand that God only accepts the prayers of true believers.

In the Old Testament, authorized incense was never to be mixed with any other. When it was, the people offering it died. This lesson is important for us – we are never to pray with non-believers in inter-faith prayer gatherings. By doing so, we are telling them that their prayers are as valid as ours. In this, we – by default – are condoning the false god they worship. Only one type of prayer is acceptable to God and that is prayer offered to, and through, Jesus Christ.

The Lamb is worthy. He receives worship, He receives petition, and He receives prayers. He is the Prophet, Priest, and King. He is JESUS!

How marvelous is Your plan, O God! You have never lost control! When we thought all was lost, Your plan was being carried out in the Person of Jesus Christ. The Lamb of God has prevailed and we are saved! Praises be to You for the marvelous workings of Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

And they sang a new song, saying:
"You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, Revelation 5:9

In Chapter 4, the living creatures and the twenty-four elders were seen to fall before the One on the throne, saying –

> "You are worthy, O Lord,
> To receive glory and honor and power;
> For You created all things,
> And by Your will they exist and were created." Revelation 4:11

That was a doxology of praise to the Lord for His creative efforts.

Now, in Chapter 5, the living creatures and the twenty-four elders are seen to fall before the Lamb. In this, it says, "And they sang a new song, saying." The verb is in the present tense – "they are singing." The song of creation has been sung, but creation was marred by the sin of man. Paul referred to the fallen state of creation in Romans 8 –

> "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. **23** Not only *that,* but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body." Romans 8:22, 23

Fallen things must be redeemed. Now, the heavenly scene shows that the Creator, Jesus Christ, has become the Redeemer. The song that the heavenly chorus sings is an ongoing song that begins with, "You are worthy to take the scroll."

The Lamb is worthy because He had done what no other creature in all of creation could do. He alone was able to approach the throne of God and to receive the scroll that none other could touch, or even look at. The Lamb prevailed and earned the right "to open its seals."

Not only could He take the scroll, but He has the power to break the seals and to effect the purposes of the holy God upon the world. None other could because no other was found worthy. But the Lamb could because, as the heavenly chorus testifies, "For You were slain."

As in verse 5:6, the word here signifies to butcher. In this case, it was in sacrifice. The Lamb became an offering before God. This doesn't mean that there is nothing else worthy in the Lamb except the sacrifice, but that the sacrifice is the highlight and consummation of all other worthiness. In other words, the Lamb had to be pure and undefiled to be acceptable.

The slaying of the Lamb highlighted that fact. Everything about Jesus Christ and His worthiness comes into focus at the cross of Calvary. It is the cross that revealed His infinite worth in all other areas. This is confirmed as the song continues with, "And have redeemed us."

The word translated as "redeemed" is *agorazó*. It signifies the act of buying in a marketplace, and thus to purchase. Christ has come into the "marketplace of the world," and purchased His people back "to God." In other words, it was through the slaying of the Lamb that the purchase was made, and that act was acceptable to bring fallen man back to His Creator. Thus, it was an act of redemption. And it was accomplished, as it says, "by Your blood."

Rather than "by," the Greek reads "in." Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God, has redeemed man to God in His blood. The purchase was made through the slaying, but the price paid is His blood. It is reflective of the words of Peter –

> "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; **18** knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Peter 1:17-19

It is the blood of Christ that has paid the price to redeem fallen man to God. The implication is that no other price is acceptable, and it confirms the words of Jesus of John 14:6 –

> "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

If Satan possesses the right to fallen man, and the price paid to bring us back to God is the blood of Christ, then all either belong to the devil still, or they belong to God because of Christ. There are no other options available. The church, meaning the people of God, are brought near to Him through this transaction. Again, as Paul noted in Acts –

> "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Acts 20:28

It is the incarnation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ who has made this possible. And in His sacrifice, He has redeemed people, "Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

The word translated as tribe is *phulé*. It is the root of our modern words that begins with "phyl," such as phylum, phylogeny, and so on. It signifies a tribe of people, such as race or lineage. It is used to refer to the twelve tribes of Israel, but here it extends to every tribe of people.

The next word, translated as "tongue," is *glossa*. It refers to any known languages.

The third word, translated as "people," is *laos*. Here, it signifies people in general, even a crowd.

Finally, the fourth word, translated as "nation," is *ethnos*. It refers to any race, people, or nation found throughout the world.

The use of these four descriptors is to show the all-encompassing power of the blood of Christ to redeem, and the all-effectual nature of the redemption. No person or group of people who fall into some particular category is excluded, and all are included in the possible redemption. For those who come to God through Christ, they go from "potential redemption" to "actually redeemed."

It is to be noted again (as was noted in verse 4:11) that in the giving of the Ten Commandments, as is recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 4, the reason for the giving of the Sabbath follows the pattern of the doxologies of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of Revelation – Creation and then Redemption. This can be seen when they are placed side by side –

> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **10** but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. **11** For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." Exodus 20:8-11

> "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **14** but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. **15** And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." Deuteronomy 5:13-15

One can see in this that the "rest" of God which was first referred to after the six days of creation is finally realized in God's act of redemption through Jesus Christ. All who come to Christ "do enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:3). In other words, the Sabbath of God is not a day of the week, but a state of existence. Israel's weekly Sabbath was given as a type, or shadow, of what is offered in Christ. Now that Christ has come, those who believe in Him enter the true rest of God. Thus, Paul reveals that we now exist in a state that the Sabbath, and the other Old Covenant types, only anticipated –

> "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, **17** which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." Colossians 2:16, 17

Life application: Worthy! The Lamb is worthy; the Lion has prevailed; the scroll will be opened after all. The Creator is now the Redeemer.

Before, the call was made to all humanity – "Is there no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth who could open the scroll, or look at it?" Everything appeared to be lost, and all humanity was unworthy – dead in sins. But then came Christ Jesus! The slain Lamb stepped forward – the One who redeemed us to God by His own precious blood. God's plan for the ages is fulfilled in the God/Man – Jesus Christ.

And this plan isn't for a certain group of people only. Jews are covered – yes, of course. They are the line from whom Jesus can trace His earthly lineage. But this isn't just about the Jews… This is about "every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

Do you dislike someone because he is Asian? Jesus has shed His blood to redeem him too. Do you feel somehow superior to the Mexicans who moved in down the road? Jesus' life was given so that they too can have the offering of eternal life. Does the thought of sharing a table with an African upset you? Jesus has offered them a seat at the Feast which is coming – a heavenly banquet. When you were stationed in the

Philippines, did the customs of the locals make you long for home to get away from such people? Jesus has sent them an invitation as well.

If you are bearing some ill will towards a different ethnic group, culture, nation, or language, you need to re-evaluate your thinking. They are God's image-bearers and equal with you in all ways. Acts 17:26 bears this out –

> "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."

We all came from one man – Adam. We are all one group – human beings. And we are all given the same opportunity to call on the name of Jesus. God is no respecter of persons. The Lamb died for all. The Lamb prevailed for all. The Lamb is JESUS!

Lord, it is true that we have held bitterness towards people of other cultures. Most of us have felt ill will towards them. In this, we have failed to look at the greater picture – that they are, in fact, a part of the same human family. We came from the same father, Adam, and each bears Your image too. Give us the sense, the will, and the heart to love those whom we have not loved in the past. Amen.

And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth." Revelation 5:10

This verse continues and completes the doxology sang by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders concerning the triumph of the Lamb. In it, there are several significant differences between source texts. Placed side by side, they read –

> "And have made us kings and priests to our God;
> And we shall reign on the earth." NKJV

> "You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth." Holman

The latter text certainly fits what is being presented far better. The living creatures and elders are in heaven. Therefore, to say "we" makes no sense, unless they are taken as representing the people of God as a whole. If so, then "we" instead of "they" can be allowed.

Further, the previous verse said, "Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." Therefore, to say "they" instead of "we" again makes the most sense. Finally, instead of "kings and priests," it reads "a kingdom and priests." Again, as Christ is the King, and as His people are given the priestly duty of sharing the gospel, this makes by far the most sense. It is, therefore, from this perspective that this verse should probably be considered.

And so, with that understood, they first sing forth, "You made them a kingdom and priests to our God." It is reflective of the words of Revelation 1:6 –

> "and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--the glory and dominion are His forever and ever. Amen." Holman

As noted in the commentary of verse 1:6, that verse (and indeed countless other verses also), as well as this verse, are misused by hyperdispensationalists in their claim that there are two gospels – one to the Jews and one to the Gentiles. They claim that the kingdom belongs to the Jews, as do the priestly services. Such claims are false.

The idea of being part of a kingdom permeates Paul's writings, the term "kingdom" being applied to believers almost fifteen times. It would be rather stupid to have a kingdom without a King. Further, the idea of being priests is not limited to the Jewish people and a Jewish kingdom. Paul uses the term in the book of Romans, saying –

> "But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, **16** to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, <u>ministering as a priest</u> the gospel of God, so that *my* offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:15, 16 (NASB)

Paul shows that preaching the gospel is a priestly duty in the New Covenant. He then says this to those at Corinth –

> "Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat *of the things* of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings of* the altar? **14** Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." 1 Corinthians 9:13

Again, Paul directly equates preachers of the gospel to the priests who ministered in the temple under the Old Covenant, demonstrating that they were only types of what would come in the New Covenant. Thus, this is speaking of all in the church who are a

part of the kingdom of Christ and who share the gospel as priest. This is in service to God. Understanding that, the doxology finishes with, “and they will reign on the earth.”

The verb is in the future tense. However, Vincent’s Word Studies says, “Read βασιλεύουσιν they reign. Their reigning is not future, but present.” This makes complete sense. The kingdom of God that is being referred to is not an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one. Even now this kingdom reigns. This does not, however, negate a literal kingdom in the millennium where Israel will be exalted above the nations.

However, the spiritual kingdom spoken of in the epistles is referred to both in the sense of here and now, and also in the future. Paul speaks of it as “right now” in verses such as Romans 14:17. He refers to it as a future reality in verses such as 1 Corinthians 15:50.

Life application: Care must be taken when evaluating differences in verses from various source texts. Without taking the whole counsel of God into consideration, false doctrines – such as hyperdispensationalism – are an inevitable result. Always be ready to consider variations with an open mind when they are supported by Scripture elsewhere.

In the end, let us trust that the differences that do exist can be explained, and let us trust that the word we have is sufficient for all matters of doctrine and understanding the greater plan of redemption that is found in the pages of Scripture.

What a wonderful Lord! What a wonderful Savior! You brought us out of the chains of sin and condemnation, and You have freed us to be Your servants. But even more, You have given us the right to serve You in Your kingdom – even now – if we will just step forward and participate. We stand up and praise You, O God. Thank You for the precious gift of Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, Revelation 5:11

After the song of praise from the living creatures and the twenty-four elders, John’s attention is again redirected. As he says, “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders.” The Greek reads *ēkousa phōnēn*, “I heard a voice.” It is singular. One can imagine this immense heavenly host breaking out in a single united voice.

Further, it is as if he didn't even see these angels before. His attention was so captivated by the vision of the scroll, the Lamb, and so on, that the angels were completely out of his focus, but now, because of their voice, they come into clarity of vision. Once in focus, John was certainly awed at what he saw, describing the scene in a superlative way, saying, "and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand."

In this, the Greek reads, *myriades myriadōn*, or "myriads *of* myriads." A myriad signifies ten thousand. So, a literal reading would be ten thousands *of* ten thousands. If counted exactly, it would be one hundred million. However, the term in the plural is simply given to express an immense, or even unlimited number. That this is a superlative, and not an exact number, is then seen in the addition of the next words, which say, "and thousands of thousands."

The Greek reads, *chiliades chiliadōn*, or "thousands *of* thousands." The word *chilias* signifies one thousand. Saying "thousands of thousands" is again a way of expressing a superlative. By adding it to the previous number, the idea is that John is viewing an inexpressible multitude. It is a number he wouldn't even attempt to exactingly count.

Such a heavenly multitude is described elsewhere in Scripture, such as –

> "The chariots of God *are* twenty thousand,
> *Even* thousands of thousands;
> The Lord is among them *as in* Sinai, in the Holy *Place.*" Psalm 68:17

In the end, the number of the heavenly host that is around the scene set before him is immense, and what their purpose in the divine vision is will next be seen.

<u>Life application:</u> People write songs about the voices of angels, knowing that they must be the sweetest sound of all – like a heavenly concert. In this vision, there weren't just a few. Rather, their number went on and on and on. The sight that John saw encompassed a number of angels that was simply impossible to count.

Think on what is being relayed. Jesus, before His crucifixion, said-

> "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. **53** Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? **54** How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" Matthew 26:52-54

All of the power of the heavenly hosts was at Jesus' disposal, and yet He willingly suffered for the sins of fallen man. If you wonder what you are worth to Jesus, it is reflected in this thought today. All of the power of heaven could have been brought to save Jesus from the cross, but He died for you.

Jesus said something else on similar lines-

> "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:26

In other words, all of the riches of the world are not worth one human soul. What we cannot always see clearly is brought into absolute clarity of focus at the cross of Jesus. And so, the angels' voice is raised to proclaim the majesty they beheld. As this is so, shouldn't we likewise proclaim the magnificence of our Lord! He is worth all of our praise, because He is JESUS!

Lord, when I have doubts about my own worth, all I need to do is to reflect on the cross. What You did for fallen man includes each of us, unworthy as we are. We are so sorry for the sins of our lives, and we are sorry that they necessitated Your sacrifice. We will forever sing Your praises as we gather around Your glorious heavenly throne. Amen.

saying with a loud voice:
"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" Revelation 5:12

What is recorded here is based on what was said in the previous verse –

> "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, **12** saying with a loud voice..."

With that context understood, the voice of the many angels is described now as *megalē*. It is variously translated as loud, mighty, great, and so on. Some translations also change the word "saying" to "singing," to convey the idea that this doxology is actually sung out. Either way, their words are words of great exaltation and laud concerning the event that took place before them, beginning with, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain."

Like the previous doxology from the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, the focus is not merely on the Lamb, but that He was slain. What is implied is that the Lamb

was worthy prior to having been slain, but that the slaying of the Lamb completes the idea of worthiness. In other words –

The Lamb was born worthy; pure and undefiled, and qualified to complete a mission. The Lamb lived worthily without ever sinning. He remained qualified throughout His life. The Lamb died in sinless perfection. Thus, He was not only qualified to take the scroll, but He was now worthy of doing so as well.

Death was a necessary part of the Lamb's mission. Until death in a sinless state occurred, the argument by someone could be made that the Lamb could potentially sin. Thus, the scroll would need to be withheld from the Lamb based on this "what if" scenario.

However, in His death of sinless perfection, the mission came to an end. There could never be a challenge to the right to take the scroll. In Christ's death under the Law of Moses, the law was fulfilled. In fulfilling the law, it was annulled (Hebrews 7:18), made obsolete (Hebrews 8:13), and taken away (Hebrews 10:9). Paul gives the appropriate symbolism in Colossians 2 –

> "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, **14** having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."
>
> -Colossians 2:13, 14

Nobody walked up to the cross of Christ and nailed a copy of the Law of Moses to it. Rather, the symbolism Paul is conveying is that Christ, the embodiment (and thus the fulfillment) of the law, died on the cross. As He embodies the law, and as He died, the law died (annulled, made obsolete, and taken away) with Him. In Christ, His people likewise die to the law.

This is what is being conveyed in the doxology. It is the slaying of the Lamb that makes this possible. In His death, He who was qualified and capable of receiving the scroll also become worthy:

> "To receive power and riches and wisdom,
> And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

Power – (Note: there is an article in the Greek before "power." It is "the power.") As the Creator, He was entitled to all power and authority, but He set that aside to walk and

dwell among us. However, after the resurrection, He said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). With authority comes power. Jesus has complete and absolute power over the created order because of His having prevailed.

Riches – This includes every tangible part of the creation. Not only does He have rule over the creation, but He is the owner of it. He is the Creator and He is the Redeemer. Everything belongs to Him alone. We are only His servants participating in the abundance of His wealth.

Wisdom – In 1 Corinthians 1:24, Christ is called “the wisdom of God.” What God has done has been done through Jesus Christ. This includes the way creation occurred and how it continues to work and be sustained. Further, the way God has preordained the plan of redemption demonstrates the execution of His infinite intelligence. The depths of His wisdom are embodied in the Person of Jesus.

Strength – The concept of strength belonging to God permeates the Bible, such as in the psalms – “To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises” (Psalm 59:17). Jesus Christ is worthy to receive this honor because it came from Him and is now returning to Him as the Victor.

Honor – This includes reverence, respect, and worship. Because He prevailed, Jesus has the right to all of these now and forevermore. When we bow before God, when we proclaim the majesty of God, when we pray to God, we do these things through Jesus Christ.

Glory – In God, there is no darkness. He is the infinite brightness of splendor and radiance. Jesus Christ is the One who reveals this to us. Towards the end of Revelation, it says, “The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light” (Revelation 21:23). Jesus Christ receives and directs the full glory of God. He is the very light that dispels the darkness.

Blessing – There are two types of blessing that should be noted. The first is the blessing from a greater to a lesser, such as when a father blesses his son. The other blessing is the one spoken of here and can be equated with “praise.” Jesus is worthy of all blessing and praise. He created us, and therefore He is to be blessed. He redeemed us, and therefore He is to be blessed. He sustains us, and therefore He is to be blessed.

Life application: The heavenly choir of angels – an innumerable number of them – joins with the living creatures and the elders to proclaim the infinite worth of the Lamb. This Lamb was slain, and He bears the marks of His death as a testament to the ages that He

paid the price for the people of the world. They call out seven ways in which He is worthy. He is to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing.

Yes! Worthy is the Lamb. Worthy is Jesus! For all eternity, may the souls of God's people bless the Lord! He is great, He is glorious, and He is worthy! He is JESUS!

O Lord our God, You are infinitely worthy of power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing! May we never fail to give You these through the Person of Jesus. He is the One who humbled Himself even to death so that we may have life. Through Him we ascribe to You the splendor and majesty that You are due! Amen.

And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:
"Blessing and honor and glory and power
***Be* to Him who sits on the throne,**
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Revelation 5:13

Two doxologies have come forth. The first was from the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders before the throne. The second was from the angelic host around the throne. Now, the direction is focused out to the very extent of the earth itself, saying, "And every creature."

The word is *ktisma*, and it signifies a created thing. Thus, it includes all of the product of the material creation, and anything that is created but immaterial. It is an all-encompassing thought that includes that "which is in heaven and on the earth." There is an article before "heaven." It is "the heaven," and it signifies not merely the skies above man, but the heavenly area of God. Thus, the statement is all-inclusive of every created thing, without exception. This further includes all that is "under the earth."

This is certainly speaking of those departed dead who are in Sheol (Old Testament), the place of the dead (Hades in the New Testament). This is spoken of throughout the Old Testament, such as this account in Numbers 14 where "the pit" is referring to Sheol –

> "Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, **32** and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all *their* goods. **33** So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. **34** Then all Israel

who *were* around them fled at their cry, for they said, 'Lest the earth swallow us up *also!*'" Numbers 14:31-34

In the New Testament, Paul refers to Hades in relation to the exact heavenly scene being seen in Revelation right now. He speaks of the victory over this pit –

> "So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'
> **55** 'O Death, where *is* your sting?
> O Hades, where *is* your victory?'
> **56** The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. **57** But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
>
> -1 Corinthians 15:54-56

The term "under the earth," surely also includes the demonic spirits that are awaiting their own fate, such as are referred to in 2 Peter, using the term Tartarus (translated as "hell") –

> "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment." 2 Peter 2:4

Though it may seem contrary for a condemned demon to call out in praise, it would be the natural thing for it, or for any consigned to separation from God, to acknowledge their rightful judgment and condemnation. To see the glory of what God has done through Christ will demand that they so acknowledge God's glory, and also Christ's position sharing in that glory.

John next continues with "and such as are in the sea." The Greek reads "on the sea." This then is an all-inclusive statement of every creature that is both at the top of the sea and that resides in the deep. Every single creature is a part of this heavenly chorus, and their praise is in accord with the words of Paul in Romans 8 –

> "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; **21** because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now." Romans 8:20-22

The creation itself, including every creature, is delivered by the work of Christ. The heavenly scene is given here in anticipation of that glorious day when all will be returned to a state of incorruptible perfection. Because of this, John says, "and all that are in them, I heard saying." All of creation sees the marvel of the work of God in Christ and responds. The jubilant words call out, "Blessing and honor and glory and power."

There is an article before each word in the Greek – "The blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the power." In the previous verse, it said the Lamb, who was slain, is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. In this verse, what He was worthy of receiving is acknowledged as received. But it is not a general sense of receiving blessing, honor, glory, and power. Rather, the articles before each word clearly indicate that He has received the substance of what the words mean. Any blessing, honor, glory, and power essentially belongs "to Him who sits on the throne."

This is speaking of God in Christ, from whom all things find their source. He is the Creator and the Sustainer of all creation. Further, these honorifics (the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the power) belong "to the Lamb."

Not only does God in Christ possess them, but Christ in His humanity as the Redeemer of man likewise possesses them. It is reflective of the words of Paul to the Colossians –

> "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. **17** And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. **18** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.
> **19** For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, **20** and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Colossians 1:15-20

God in Christ created, and He redeemed. To Him belong the very definition of what these honorifics mean. And this is not something that will ever change. Instead, it is, and it will be "forever and ever!"

The Greek reads *eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn*, "or to the ages *of* the ages." It is a way of saying "time without limit," or as we say in English, "forever and ever." Such is the nature of the magnificence of what God has done. There shall never be a time that He is

not praised and that He does not possess the right to that praise for what He has done in Christ.

Life application: Take time today to read Psalm 148 and think on all the worth that God is due. It is we who turned from Him, and it is we who disrupted the very fabric of creation through our rebellion. And yet, He took it upon Himself to restore what was marred, and He did it through accepting the punishment of our wrongdoing in Himself.

Surely, He is worthy. He is great. He is magnified in power and in glory. He is JESUS!

Oh Lord Jesus, may You be praised and held in the highest honor among Your people! You are the King of glory and are worthy of every blessing and honor that can be given. All things come from You and to You are all things. Glory to God in the highest! Glory to the Lamb of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus! Amen.

Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever. Revelation 5:14

The words of this verse take us back to the previous chapter –

> "Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne." Revelation 5:9, 10

Here it notes that "the four living creatures said 'Amen.'" It is a note of confirmation concerning the doxologies of glory and honor just called out in the previous verses. With that noted, it then says, "And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever."

This is fitting because it is these living creatures and the twenty-four elders who began this cycle of praise in verse 5:8 in reaction to the Lamb taking the scroll. First came their song, then that of the many angels, and then that of every creature. Now, the cycle completes, beginning with the response of the four living creatures.

The response by the twenty-four elders to that action is exactly as noted occurs at the various times when such glory and honor is given by these four living creatures. Though not stated, it can be assumed that this is also one of the times that they also cast their crowns before the throne. The Lamb has proven His infinite worth through the shedding of His blood, and the response is to acknowledge His preeminence in all things.

Life application: The heavenly scene has come full circle from where it started in chapter 4. The attention was focused to the One on the throne who lives forever and ever, and then to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, and then to the Lamb who was slain. And now, after demonstrating that He is the qualified Redeemer who descended from David, and yet was David's Source, the attention is redirected to Him as He sits on His rightful throne and to Him who is the Lamb. As these praises are proclaimed to both equally, the imagery is that of the God/Man.

The term "Him who lives forever and ever" is used seven times in Revelation and it shows us the eternality of the Lord. Here in the last verse of Chapter 5, it is repeated to remind us that everything we have experienced in this heavenly scene is given to show us the magnificence of Jesus. He is our Creator. He is the One who directed history toward the people of Israel and then to the tribe of Judah. From the tribe of Judah, redemptive history came more clearly into focus in the great king, David. And from David, the genealogy continued (as is recorded Matthew 1 and Luke 3) to the Christ – our Lord Jesus.

The gospels then tell us of His work, His death, and His resurrection. The establishment of His church is recorded in Acts and then the importance of His work is explained in the epistles. Here, in the book of Revelation, we have the ongoing unveiling of Him in His entire majestic splendor – showing us in apocalyptic form marvelous views of who He is. And now our attention is refocused on the throne from which He came – eternity itself.

Jesus stepped off of this throne and united with human flesh to do His amazing work and then He returned to it – there in heaven to "sit at the right hand of God" with "angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him" (1 Peter 3:22). He is our all in all. He is our Source of life and our eternal hope of life forevermore. He is JESUS!

Lord God Almighty! It all makes sense when we stand back and look at what is presented from a historical perspective. Yes, it all comes into focus! Through Jesus Christ, all things are from You, belong to You, have been accomplished by You, and they return to You. You are the entire focus of it all. May our eyes never be directed away from the splendor of Your glory! Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." Revelation 6:1

Chapter 5 ended with the great praises of the heavenly host, worshiping the Lamb. Chapter 6 now begins with the Lamb exercising His right to open the scroll. In this, John says, "Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals."

What John is actually seeing here is debated. Is it a depiction drawn on the scroll itself so that each time a seal is broken, that is what is seen? Is it a written depiction on the scroll that can be read after the seal is broken? Is the seal broken and then a visual image appears? The text does not say and being dogmatic over this is therefore pointless. But because verse 5:1 says that the scroll was "written inside and on the back," a logical assumption might be that John is able to read what is written there.

The point is that when the seal is broken, John understands the imagery and conveys it to us. When we read Revelation, our minds see what he has conveyed. From there, we then interpret (rightly or wrongly) what the imagery signifies. Even the heavenly scene itself is apocalyptic in nature and merely represents spiritual truths intended to convey to us things that have or will actually occur.

Understanding this, with the opening of the first seal, John next says, "and I heard one of the four living creatures saying." This is one of the creatures first described in verse 4:6. Again, it is speculation to guess which creature is being referred to, but if it follows the order outlined in verse 4:7, then it would be the lion. As the next three identify which beast is speaking, this makes that thought much more likely. Further, it seems to be the case because John next says, "saying with a voice like thunder."

Here, it uses the word *phóné*, or sound. It can be a voice, a language, or a noise. Being described like thunder would be characteristic of a lion, and only in this one verse does it say this. The next three do not give this graphic statement. From there, John relays what is said, it is "Come and see."

Some manuscripts simply say "Come." If so, rather than asking John to come and see, it would be a call for the rider on the horse of the coming verse to come forth. This actually seems to make more sense because in the opening of the fourth and fifth seal there is no call to "Come and see." But if John had to come forward to see the first four writings on the scroll, he would also need to come forward to see the others as well.

Further, John is asked to come in verses 17:1 & 21:9. But the word there, *deuro*, is completely different than the one used here. In this verse, it is the word *erchomai*, "to come," but meaning "to go." In other words, it signifies moving from one place to another.

In this, the call to "Come" is calling forth the entity mentioned in the next verse in order to go out. We can imagine a soldier in his barracks being called by his commander, "I need you to come. The battle has been joined." In this, the soldier comes out and goes. This appears to be the intent of what is being conveyed in the coming verses. The beasts are calling forth the executors of judgment in succession, instructing them to go and accomplish their tasks. As the four creatures reflect one of the four aspects of Christ displayed in the gospels, this meaning of "Come" (to go out) seems all the more likely.

Life application: From this point on, even until chapter 19 (with some interesting inserts along the way), the main context of the text will be a viewing of the seven years of tribulation which will come upon the whole world. This is the "seventieth week" of Daniel's seventy weeks, just as was revealed to him in Daniel 9:24-27. This is the correct view – that the events are yet future and are centered on the people and nation of Israel. As Daniel was told –

> "Seventy weeks are determined
> For your people and for your holy city," Daniel 9:24

Daniel was a Jew and Jerusalem is Daniel's holy city. No other interpretation is acceptable as an evaluation of what is to be depicted. The lesser imagery can be debated over, but the overall theme of what is presented is the fulfillment of this final seven-year period.

The fact that this is future is perfectly evident from a proper study of those four verses in Daniel as they are revealed in human history and as is confirmed throughout the rest of the Bible. The Lord Jesus was born, lived as, died as, and was resurrected a Jew. He ascended from the Mount of Olives and promised to return at some future point – and His return will be to that same spot, literally and physically –

> "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
> Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
> And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,
> From east to west,
> *Making* a very large valley;

Half of the mountain shall move toward the north
And half of it toward the south." Zechariah 14:4

When He returns, it will be to His people – Israel. Only a poor interpretation of the Bible, and faulty presuppositions, will arrive at any other conclusion. From the opening of the seven seals, and through the trumpet judgments and bowl judgments, there is an immense amount of disagreement as to the timing and meaning of what is occurring.

Because these things are future, it would be inappropriate to be overly dogmatic about much of the interpretation. A careful evaluation of what will be presented is needed, but there are many things that cannot be known for certain. Like all of prophecy, it is only fully understood when it is accomplished within the stream of time. What is past is certain and what is clear is certain. That which is veiled will be fully understood only when it happens.

Of the events now beginning to be portrayed, John's eyes will behold, and his pen will write out the details of what is coming. The world is being warned in advance. God has graciously offered us to see these future events. When they arrive, no one will be able to say that what happens isn't what was prophesied, and none will be able to say they were not warned. The events will be clear enough that those left behind after the rapture will have choices to make.

Lord Jesus, open our eyes and our hearts to appreciate the prophecies given in Your word. As we peer into things written there, but which are yet to be fulfilled, help us to understand them properly. May our study of Your word help us to more fully appreciate that You are in complete control of the future and that nothing coming upon the world happens apart from Your will. We thank You for Your perfect plan of the ages. Amen.

And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. Revelation 6:2

Verse 6:1 saw the opening of the first seals and the voice like thunder calling out. The response to that leads to John's words, saying, "And I looked." This signifies a new part of the vision. His attention is directed away from the living creature and to what has been called forth by it. With that accomplished, he says, "and behold, a white horse."

Here we have two separate emblems to consider. The horse in Hebrew is the word *sus*. It also means a swallow (the bird) and swiftness. One can see the similarity between the two as a horse darts and leaps around swiftly like a swallow in the air does. The horse is used at various times to signify battle or war. Two of the many such examples are –

"The horse *is* prepared for the day of battle,
But deliverance *is* of the LORD." Proverbs 21:31

"He devours the distance with fierceness and rage;
Nor does he come to a halt because the trumpet *has* sounded.
25 At *the blast of* the trumpet he says, 'Aha!'
He smells the battle from afar,
The thunder of captains and shouting." Job 39:24, 25

Psalm 147:10 shows that a secondary aspect of the horse is that of strength. Taken together, one sees that this is a symbol of strength in battle.

The color white signifies purity, innocence, righteousness, and the like. That has already been seen in verses 3:4 & 5, and elsewhere. It was also the color of royalty at John's time. The commanding officer would ride a white horse. That continued throughout history. With this understood, John next says, "He who sat on it had a bow." The bow is an implement used in hunting, in battle, and so on. As it is held by one on a horse, it is here reflective of an instrument of war.

At times, commentaries make a to-do about there being no arrow mentioned. The reason for this is to justify their position that this rider is Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who has a bow but no arrow. This is an argument from silence. First, a bowman implies a man who will use a bow. Further, a bowman without an arrow would be a rather dull person. Going into a battle with a gun and no bullets makes as much sense as a tennis puck. Secondly, time and again in Scripture, the bow is mentioned without noting arrows with it, such as –

"I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, *also* the two kings of the Amorites, *but* not with your sword or with your bow."
-Joshua 24:12

Having a bow implies having arrows. The bow stands as representative of the weapon, just as having a machine gun implies having the capability to fire bullets. John next says, "and a crown was given to him."

The *stephanos*, or "crown," is a symbol of royalty, honor, and victory. Christ wore such a crown of thorns in His crucifixion. He the victorious King. The gospels mention the crowns of rejoicing, righteousness, life, and glory. Each is a symbol of honor. The twenty-four elders of Revelation have such crowns of royal heavenly governance. Thus,

such symbolism is seen here as well – royalty, honor, and victory. Of this rider, John next says, "and he went out conquering and to conquer."

Of this, Albert Barnes says, "John saw in him two things: one, that he had the aspect or port of a conqueror - that is, of one who had been accustomed to conquest, and who was confident that he could conquer; the [o]ther was, that this was clearly the design for which he went forth, and this would be the result of his going forth."

This is correct. The horseman is summoned forth to wage war, to do so under the guise of purity and royal authority, and who anticipates victory.

To understand the symbolism further, the vision of Zechariah and four horses should be reviewed. That ancient symbolism is being brought forth again in Revelation. In Zechariah 1, four variously colored horses were sent throughout the earth as it rested quietly. These were followed by four horns (symbols of power and strength) that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

They were followed by four craftsmen. Of these, it said –

> "These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head; but the craftsmen are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up *their* horn against the land of Judah to scatter it." Zechariah 1:20

The four horses are jointly sent on a mission, just as the four horses of Revelation are sent. They have a unified purpose. Understanding this, the symbolism of this rider on the white horse is identified by scholars in various ways – he is Jesus, he is the church, he is the antichrist, he signifies the Roman empire of ages past, and so on. As this rider is united with the other three coming horses, it is not Jesus.

Jesus will return on a white horse after the tribulation period. It is not the church; they are already taken out at the rapture. He is not the Roman empire of ages past. However, he is associated with Rome, in that he is the coming antichrist. In Daniel 9:27, it says of the coming antichrist –

> "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
> But in the middle of the week
> He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.
> And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
> Even until the consummation, which is determined,
> Is poured out on the desolate."

This coming person is described further in Daniel and elsewhere. He will be a man of war, but he will also supposedly bring peace as a great ruler. Being antichrist, he will be the hope and expectation of what the world anticipates of the Prince of Peace, but He is actually the one to lead them away from any peace at all.

To read an almost astonishingly detailed analysis of all of the aspects of the symbolism of this verse, one can refer to the commentary on it by Albert Barnes at this link. He does a great job with the symbolism, and he gives countless references to support his analysis. However, his final conclusion is incorrect. He identifies it as the old Roman empire.

The problem with this is that it fails to take into consideration the idea of dispensations. The tribulation period, now being described in Revelation, occurs after the church age, not during it. His conclusion is correct to a point (that Rome is involved), but he could not foresee Rome being revived as a power. He thus inserted the past, not the future, into his analysis. Despite this, the analysis is excellent.

This rider on the white horse is not Jesus, but the false Christ who will come prior to the return of Jesus. The breaking of the first seal is not to bring peace to the earth, but judgment on the earth. This rider is going forth to make war. Along with him, three other terrifying riders will come forth as well.

Life application: This rider has been given authority to do his work during the time of the tribulation period. Eight more times in the coming chapters, the term "was given" is used to indicate an allowance of evil power, so the argument cannot be made that this is Jesus from that term. The term "anti" when applied to the antichrist means "instead of." And this is certainly what is expected during the tribulation period based on the figure mentioned in Daniel 9:26 – "the prince that shall come."

This prince is anticipated to come in the final seven-year period mentioned in Daniel's vision, and that seven-year period is still future; it is the tribulation period of Revelation. The figure in this verse then is this coming antichrist – going out conquering and to conquer.

To avoid being here when he arrives on the scene, be sure to call out for Jesus now. In believing in His gospel, you will be saved. When the rapture occurs, you will be taken from the world before this terrible time comes.

The timeline is set by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 –

1) Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you: not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter,
2) as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. [warning] Let no one deceive you by any means;
    a. for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition

The "falling away" and the "man of sin" being revealed is being stated based on "the day of Christ," not "our gathering together to Him."

In other words, the rapture will occur. Only then will the antichrist be revealed who will sign the seven-year peace deal with Israel. During that seven years, he will fulfill the symbolism of this rider on the white horse. We are not to look for the antichrist. Rather we are to have our eyes fixed on JESUS.

Lord, the best part about reading Your word is to know that we know we are already safe in You. The antichrist who is coming has no authority over us because we are Yours! Hallelujah and amen to this! Lord, we pray for our family and friends who still don't know you. Please move in their lives now to desire calling on You and to believe in Your gospel message, so that they will be spared from this time of trial to come. Amen.

When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." Revelation 6:3

The focus goes now from the white horse and its rider to the scroll saying, "When He opened the second seal." The breaking of the seals allows for judgment upon an unrepentant world, and so that is what can be anticipated again with the breaking of this seal. Understanding this, John says, "I heard the second living creature." This would be the one resembling a calf (verse 4:7). He speaks forth, "Come and see."

Like the previous seal, manuscripts vary here. Rather than, "Come and see," as if a command to John, other manuscripts simply say, "Come." This would be a calling forth of the entity held by the seal. If this is correct, and it appears to be the more likely translation, it is a call for the entity to come forth, and thus to go out, like with the first seal.

<u>Life application:</u> The living creatures around the throne are named in the same order as the gospels, and they are calling out in the same order as the gospels. What is revealed in the four gospel accounts is the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

For those who accepted the message before this time of tribulation, pardon of sins has been granted, and eternal life has been given. They were taken at the rapture, escaping the things to come. But now, those same gospels that were rejected by the remaining people on earth, testify against them. The living creatures are calling out the destroyers, one by one, who will bring judgment on the earth to those who are left behind to endure the tribulation.

There is an order to all things, and God displays His divine order in the Bible. It is consistent and it is verifiable. Because of this, His judgments also follow His divine order. We need to carefully handle the gift He has given us in the pages of the Bible. They demonstrate the great wisdom of our Creator, and they show His plan for us. Let us take heed to the words given.

Thank You Heavenly Father for the great book You have revealed to us – the Holy Bible. It is one of comfort, of wisdom, of joy, and of blessing, if we handle it properly. Help us to do so, and also give us the wisdom to study it and love it all the days You have set before us. Amen.

Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that *people* should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. Revelation 6:4

With the loosing of the second seal, John sees "Another horse, fiery red." Only one word is translated as "fiery red," but it is appropriate. The Greek word is *purrhos*, coming from *pur* – fire, or firelike. It is as if the horse is burning as it "went out." The directive to proceed was given, and the horse is loosed to begin the execution of the judgment.

The color being fiery red is overwhelmingly agreed upon to signify war, just as the planet Mars, the red planet, is a symbol of war. This probably isn't coincidence as even from the first chapter of the Bible, the heavenly objects are meant "for signs and for seasons." Planets and constellations are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible in this way. Confirming the meaning of the color, John next says, "And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth."

The Greek has an important definite article before peace. It reads, "the peace." Of this, Cambridge says, "...according to Greek usage may mean merely 'peace in general, peace in the abstract,' but may also very well stand for 'the peace' which the conquests of the previous Rider have left as their fruit."

This is a correct analysis, but it is based on a faulty premise. They (and many others) have equated the first horse and rider to Christ and the peace He brought on the earth. As shown in the Superior Word commentary of that verse, such a notion is wholly incorrect. The white horse and rider are symbols of judgment on an unrepentant world, occurring during the Tribulation period.

What the words, "the peace," are referring to would be the state of hopeful peace that comes with the signing of the seven-year peace deal between the antichrist and Israel. At the time, the whole world will anticipate peace, but the deal will only be a precursor to the unleashing of hell on earth.

Using the peace deal as a pretext, the white horse and rider will go forth conquering and to conquer. This will be followed by the red horse and rider who will take "the peace," meaning the state of peace anticipated by the supposed healing of this long sore wound on the earth, and they will do exactly the opposite. In this state, John next says, "and that *people* should kill one another."

The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel repeat the same general idea four times where they indicate a state of peace is called out by the populace when it is a lie. For example –

> "Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, 'Peace!'
> when *there is* no peace—and one builds a wall, and they plaster it with
> untempered *mortar*— **11** say to those who plaster *it* with untempered *mortar,* that
> it will fall." Ezekiel 13:10, 11

Such references speak of a state of anticipated worldly peace when the Lord is not included in the picture. Without His approval of the conduct of the people, there can be no peace. For reference, see also Jeremiah 6:14 & 8:11 and Ezekiel 13:16. Those Old Testament references are then paralleled by the greatest state of false peace to come upon the world. This is spoken of by Paul in 1 Thessalonians –

> "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I
> should write to you. **2** For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord
> so comes as a thief in the night. **3** For when they say, 'Peace and safety!'
> then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant
> woman. And they shall not escape." 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

This is "the peace" that is being referred to specifically in Revelation now. It is a false peace that has been proclaimed by the world because of the workings of the antichrist. In this, the fiery red horse is emblematic of the war that will come because of this false

state of peace. The one sitting on the horse will take the opportunity to bring about destruction and many will be killed. Of this, John finishes the verse with, "and there was given to him a great sword."

Here, the sword is a *machaira*. It signifies a slaughter-knife. It is a short sword or dagger, the purpose of which is stabbing. Thus, it carries with it the figurative meaning of being an instrument used for exacting retribution. An Old Testament passage that gives the sense of this is –

> "When they *were* at the large stone which *is* in Gibeon, Amasa came before them. Now Joab was dressed in battle armor; on it was a belt *with* a sword fastened in its sheath at his hips; and as he was going forward, it fell out. **9** Then Joab said to Amasa, '*Are* you in health, my brother?' And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. **10** But Amasa did not notice the sword that *was* in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not *strike* him again. Thus he died." 2 Samuel 20:8-10

This would have been a short sword, small enough to conceal from the eyes of Amasa until it was too late. Unlike the sword in this troubling account, Revelation describes this *machaira*, or slaughter-knife, as *megalē*, meaning "great."

The rider on the horse will not conceal his intent for slaughter. Rather, he will go forth throughout the earth with great slaughter with his great sword. This is seen in the word translated as "kill." It is *sphaxousin*, and it means "to kill by violence," rather than by means of war. War will come, but following after that, the world will devolve into a place of chaos and mayhem.

Murderous bands of thugs will prevail over the weaker, and then they themselves will slaughter each other. In other words, the whole world will devolve into lawlessness, civil war, tribal hatred, ethnic cleansing, and etc. There will be few left when the seven years of tribulation are over. What was anticipated as a time of "peace and safety" will turn out to be a time of bloody slaughter.

<u>Life application:</u> As noted, this second horseman is symbolic of war. The symbolism is given, and the general outline of what is coming is relayed in Revelation, including the parallel of this red horse and rider to the red planet, Mars. However, we should not make the error that we can either predict the future by astrology, nor should we look to them for divine guidance. Instead, we have the pages of the Bible to tell us the meaning of heavenly occurrences. Astrology is an ungodly pursuit that should never be pursued.

Rather, the Bible gives a broad and yet detailed picture for us to know what lies ahead. This horse and rider being granted to take peace from the earth are coming after the rapture as is revealed in 2 Thessalonians 1-12. Specifically, verse 7 says this – "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way."

The world is already filled with war and lawlessness, but it is restrained by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Were it not for this presence, the world would have already come to its end. But when the Holy Spirit's restraining influence through the church is removed, the world will be left to do things on its own.

How do we know this is after the rapture? It is because believers are already "sealed" with the Holy Spirit according to Ephesians 1:13, 14. If the Holy Spirit is removed (meaning the presence of the Spirit in the workings of the church), then the believers must be removed too because the Holy Spirit is a "guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:14). Once this occurs, mayhem will ensure.

Now is the time to call on Jesus. Those who do will be taken out before that time of trouble comes. The Lord has shown us these things, in advance, because He is loving and gracious. His offer of peace stands. For those who reject it, terrible times await.

Lord God, we look around and see the world in chaos and distress, and yet we know that it could be so much worse. Thank You for Your calming Holy Spirit upon the nations. Thank You for Your patience with the unruly sons of man. Help us to be lights to Your goodness during our walk here – to Your honor and glory. Amen.

When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. Revelation 6:5

Now, the focus goes from the red horse and its rider to the scroll as John says, "When He opened the third seal." More judgment can be anticipated. The world rejected the offing of God in Christ, and now – for a third time – a form of judgment will be unleashed. Following the pattern already set, John says, "I heard the third living creature." This would be the one resembling a man (verse 4:7). He speaks forth, "Come and see."

Like the previous two seals, manuscripts vary here. Rather than, "Come and see," as if a command to John, other manuscripts simply say, "Come." This would be a calling forth

of the entity held by the seal. This appears to be the more likely translation, it is a call for the entity to come forth, and thus to go out, like with the first two seals. With the call, John's attention is redirected – "So I looked, and behold, a black horse."

Black. It is the color of famine and of mourning. For example –

> "For this shall the earth mourn,
> And the heavens above be black,
> Because I have spoken.
> I have purposed and will not relent,
> Nor will I turn back from it." Jeremiah 4:28

> "Her Nazirites were brighter than snow
> And whiter than milk;
> They were more ruddy in body than rubies,
> *Like* sapphire in their appearance.
> **8** *Now* their appearance is blacker than soot;
> They go unrecognized in the streets;
> Their skin clings to their bones,
> It has become as dry as wood." Lamentations 4:7, 8

> "You have said,
> 'It is useless to serve God;
> What profit *is it* that we have kept His ordinance,
> And that we have walked as <u>mourners</u> [literally: blackly]
> Before the LORD of hosts?'" Malachi 3:14

These, and other examples, give us a Scriptural view of what this black horse portrays. With this understanding, John says, "and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand." Of the scales, Vincent's Word Studies notes, "Properly, anything which joins two bodies; hence a yoke (Matthew 11:29; Acts 15:10). The cross-beam of the loom, to which the warp was fixed; the thwarts joining the opposite sides of a ship; the beam of the balance, and hence the balance itself. The judgment of this seal is scarcity, of which the balance is a symbol, representing the time when food is doled out by weight."

An example of this is found in Leviticus 26:26 –

> "When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied."

Another in Ezekiel 4:16, 17 –

> "Moreover He said to me, 'Son of man, surely I will cut off the supply of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread, **17** that they may lack bread and water, and be dismayed with one another, and waste away because of their iniquity.'"

This weighing out of food, however, may extend beyond simple famine to the abuse of what is readily available. In other words, extorting wealth from others so that they can simply survive. This is seen in Hosea –

> "A cunning Canaanite!
> Deceitful scales *are* in his hand;
> He loves to oppress." Hosea 12:7

In the end, deprivation awaits those who enter the tribulation period. It will be a terrible time on earth. Following on from the quotation from Lamentations above, Jeremiah notes the horrifying state of dying of famine –

> "*Those* slain by the sword are better off
> Than *those* who die of hunger;
> For these pine away,
> Stricken *for lack* of the fruits of the field.
> **10** The hands of the compassionate women
> Have cooked their own children;
> They became food for them
> In the destruction of the daughter of my people." Lamentations 4:9, 10

<u>Life application:</u> The third horse is let loose. The first horse was white and carried a rider with a bow who went out conquering and to conquer. The second horse was red, and it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth through war. Now come famine and hunger – a result of the first two horses. If you see the logical progression, the entire world is following the same path that Nazi Germany went down and the same path that many other countries have gone down.

They started with a leader who supposedly could conquer and provide peace (the white horse), but he instead brought war (the red horse) and its result was famine and suffering (the black horse). These will be followed by one more, but before that one arrives, there is going to be the time of rationing which is symbolized by the scales.

Because the rationed food won't be enough to satisfy, people will secretly hide anything they can eat even from their own family. The horrendous consequences of rejecting God will result in what is now unimaginable.

Deuteronomy 28:56, 57 shows us the level that humans will sink to when the food runs out. The terrifying words read –

> "The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, will refuse to the husband of her bosom, and to her son and her daughter, **57** her placenta which comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of everything in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates."

Such is the state that the entire world will be reduced to in the years ahead. This type of situation will fill the world because of our rejection of the love of God in Jesus so that we can do things our own way. Reject that avenue now and call on Jesus before the time of horror described here comes upon the entire world.

Lord, it is overwhelming to consider what the Bible presents concerning the horrors of the tribulation period. Man will turn to the lowest levels of existence and the greatest levels of depravity on a global scale. It is hard to even comprehend that during times of abundance and prosperity. But we know it is coming. You are righteous in Your judgments because we have left You out of our lives. In wrath remember mercy, O God. Amen.

And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine." Revelation 6:6

As was seen in the previous verse, the rider on the black horse symbolizes both famine and mourning. In his hand there is a pair of scales, signifying to weigh things out by measure. Scripture provided clear instances of that being used as a means of conveying deprivation as well. When measures are used, it is to ensure an exact amount – and nothing more – is doled out. During times of abundance, such things are not even considered as the vats overflow. But during times of deprivation, every kernel of wheat becomes precious.

With that in mind, John begins this verse, saying, "And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures." This is one of the voices mentioned throughout the book that

does not identify its source. However, it can be deduced who it is. The voice is that of the Lord. We can tell this because a similar term is used four times in Revelation – in 4:6, 5:6, 6:6, and 7:17. Each time, it is referring to Him –

1) The Lord God Almighty in verse 4:6 (the Creator);
2) The Lamb who was slain in verse 5:6 (the Redeemer);
3) The Director of judgment in verse 6:6; and
4) The Lamb who is the Shepherd of His people in verse 7:17.

For now, it is a call out either bearing authority to direct (meaning the rider on the horse) or to describe (to the audience the significance of the event). John hears the voice proclaiming, “A quart of wheat for a denarius.”

The word translated as “quart” is found twice, and only in this verse. It is *choinix*. Vincent’s Word Studies explains its meaning –

“Only here in the New Testament. A dry measure, according to some, a quart; to others a pint and a half. Herodotus, speaking of the provisions for Xerxes' army, assigns a choenix of corn for a man's daily supply, evidently meaning a minimum allowance (vii., 187); and Thucydides, speaking of the terms of truce between the Lacedaemonians and the Athenians, mentions the following as one of the provisions: "The Athenians shall permit the Lacedaemonians on the mainland to send to those on the island a fixed quantity of kneaded flour, viz., two Attic quarts (χοίνικας) of barley-meal for each man" (iv., 16). Jowett ("Thucydides") says that the choenix was about two pints dry measure. So Arnold ("Thucydides"), who adds that the allowance of two choenixes of barley-meal daily to a man was the ordinary allowance of a Spartan at the public table. See Herodotus, vi., 57.”

A denarius (Greek: *dénarion*) is a small silver Roman coin that, at the time of Nero, weighed 53 grams. The value of it varied from time to time based on the value of silver. However, Matthew 20:2-16 assigns a denarius as an acceptable amount for the daily wages of a man. For example, in verse 2, it says, “Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”

With this understanding, the voice John heard continues, saying, “and three quarts of barley for a denarius.” Wheat is the finer and more desired grain for daily living. Barley is of lesser quality and is eaten by poorer people, and is also used as feed for animals.

The meaning, then, is that a person’s daily wage is just enough to buy a choinix of wheat to sustain himself, or he could buy three choinix and have a larger meal, but it will be of

lesser quality grain. Or, if he had a wife and one child, there will be a lack if he bought wheat. However, there will be enough to feed all three if they eat of the lesser quality grain. If the family is larger than three, the food will either be divided into less than subsistence amounts or choices will have to be made about who will do without. There will be no extra money for anything else.

Understanding this brings in the thought of the scales. If a person is spending everything he has made during the day just to eat, he will be absolutely sure to have the grain weighed out so that not a single kernel comes up short. Likewise, the seller would weigh the silver to make sure that it was the exact standard and had not been filed down. There would be a complete lack of trust on both sides of the scales, and measuring out one's existence, from day to day, would be the standard.

The voice from the midst of the four living creatures then finishes with, "and do not harm the oil and the wine." This goes back to Deuteronomy 28:51 –

> "And they shall eat the increase of your livestock and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed; they shall not leave you grain or new wine or oil, or the increase of your cattle or the offspring of your flocks, until they have destroyed you."

Along with farm animals, oil and wine were considered valuable commodities for daily life, but there will be no such extras in the time of tribulation. The wealthy and elite will bring the masses to a state of complete ruin. Taking all of the property and means of obtaining wealth for themselves.

For the specific term, "do not harm the oil and the wine," there have been many interpretations and guesses as to what it means. The words don't especially appear to be directed to the rider on the horse. Rather, like the previous words, they are simply statements of the state of things at the time. The cost will be set for wheat and barley, and the means of obtaining that cost will need to be carefully protected.

In other words, referring again to the parable in Matthew 20, the workers obtained their daily wage from working in the vineyards. A person who is underpaid may sabotage the property of his employer. However, in harming the oil or the wine (meaning the vineyard or the olive trees), he will have no employment at all. It is thus probably a metaphor for the complete subjugation of the masses. To harm one's mean of livelihood would mean to have no livelihood at all, and thus certain death.

Life application: In the tribulation period, the things we think of as common and easy to obtain will be completely missing. There will be no fish, no vegetables, no ice cream, no French fries, and so on. Today, if we want tater tots, we go to the store and buy them. We take what we have and pass some on to our pets. Dogs eat better now than most of the humans on earth will eat when that day comes.

The daily existence of people will be as in any socialist country seen in the world today. There will be labor with little or no reward. There will be constant deprivation, constant hunger, and constant worry if tomorrow will provide enough to simply get through the day. When someone gets sick, the daily portion will be missed due to the lack of labor. Such is the state of man for rejecting the Lord and throwing their allegiance behind the antichrist.

There will be terror on every side, and there will be sadness in every soul, even to the point of simply desiring death over continued existence. Call on Jesus today. The future has been prophesied, and it will come to pass. Be saved from this horror through belief in God's provision of the gospel. It is centered on the giving of His Son. It is found in the giving of JESUS.

Heavenly Father, we take the normal commodities of life as a given, and we never consider that a time is coming when they simply won't be available. The world is heading towards disaster, and we need to spread the word that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God. May we impress this on them now! Amen.

When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." Revelation 6:7

John's attention is now directed from the black horse and its rider to the scroll saying, "When He opened the fourth seal." Another form of judgment is set to come forth upon an unrepentant world. The terrors have been incrementally horrifying, and this will be no exception. With the opening of the seal, John says, "I heard the voice of the fourth living creature." This would be the one resembling a flying eagle (verse 4:7). He speaks forth, "Come and see."

Like the previous seals, manuscripts vary here. Rather than "Come and see," as if a command to John, other manuscripts simply say, "Come." This would be a calling forth of this horse and rider held by the seal. As this is the more likely translation, it is a call for the entity to come forth, and thus to go out, like with the previous three seals.

Life application: Thus far, there have been three calls resulting in three horses – a white horse with a rider going out to conquer; a red one with a rider going out to take peace from the earth; and a black one going out to bring famine upon the earth. The number four is used consistently throughout the Bible as the number dealing with the earth. As Bullinger says, "it is the *world number*, and especially the 'city' number."

Therefore, without even reading the next two verses, we can make the connection that this too will be a horse with a rider, and it will affect the earth in a way that logically follows a pattern we can see in past history.

As we review these verses, we will see what this pattern is and how the people of the earth will be affected – on a global scale. Until then, we can consider that these tragedies are being released from the four living creatures around the throne and that these creatures symbolize the four-fold facets of Jesus – the King, the Servant, the Son of man, and the Son of God. In other words, what is occurring is happening because these revelations of Jesus have been rejected by the people of the world.

Their rejection naturally leads to a breakdown in morality, because God is the Author of morality – it being His very nature. It leads to a breakdown in justice, in righteousness, in truth, in mercy, in grace, in holiness, and in love.

All of these have been set aside by a world at enmity with God. They will reap the rewards of wanting to do it their own way. Some will say that God then is the Author of evil, but this isn't the case. A rejection of God is what will bring on these evils. Micah tells us how they could have been avoided –

> "He has shown you, O man, what *is* good;
> And what does the LORD require of you
> But to do justly,
> To love mercy,
> And to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8

When we don't walk with God as He has revealed Himself, meaning through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, He leaves us to our own devices and the evil that results is our own fault. Be sure to come to the Fountain of all truth and blessing, be reconciled to God today through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus, give us the ability and the desire to walk in agreement with You, in a humble, just, and merciful way towards others and in a way that will glorify You. Thank You for

the Gift of Your Spirit to guide us in our walk with You. And please give us the wisdom to rely on His counsel and not on our own earthly desires and understandings. Amen.

So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth. Revelation 6:8

With the fourth seal opened, John's eyes are directed to the last horrifying horse and rider. As it says, "So I looked, and behold a pale horse." The Greek word translated as "pale" is *chlóros*. It indicates, like Clorox Bleach, a sickly pale greenish color. Without explicitly saying so, this is a horse of sickness and plague – an obvious connotation from the color. The Pulpit Commentary notes, "The Greek poets use it as an epithet of fear, and Thucydides thus describes the colour of persons affected by the plague."

With that in mind, John next says, "And the name of him who sat on it." Here is a difference from the first three horses. In each previous instance, the word *epi* was used, signifying "on." However, with this rider, the word *epanó* is used. It signifies "over," or "above." It is as if he hovers above the horse like an apparition. So deadly is he that if he sat on the horse, the beast itself would immediately die. This is because his name is "Death."

Here, the Greek reads "the Death." By simply capitalizing the word, the thought is made understandable. Death is personified by this ghastly figure. It is similar in thought to Isaiah's words where death is also prefixed by an article in the Hebrew –

> "He will swallow up death forever, (Literally: *ha'mavet* – "the Death.")
> And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces;
> The rebuke of His people
> He will take away from all the earth;
> For the LORD has spoken." Isaiah 25:8

Here, in Revelation, John says the rider is Death, "and Hades followed with him." Again, there is an article before "Hades." It is "the Hades." Like Death, the place of Death is personified. Isaiah personifies *sheol*, the place of the dead, in a similar manner by giving it lifelike attributes, saying –

> "Hell from beneath is excited about you,
> To meet *you* at your coming;
> It stirs up the dead for you,

All the chief ones of the earth;
It has raised up from their thrones
All the kings of the nations." Isaiah 14:9

It is to be understood that Hades follows with Death. The idea signifies "after-with," as in being accompanied. Thus, the Pulpit Commentary rightly states, "...not as a separate infliction, but as the necessary complement of Death in the completion of the vision, swallowing up and guarding, as it were, those seized by the latter."

Of this horse and rider, John next says, "And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth." Views vary on the scope of this. The term *ges* is used. It can be the earth, a country, the inhabitants of a region, and so on. At times, it may signify only the land of Israel, or it may signify the Roman Empire. But the sense seems rather clear. This is a heavenly vision being sent to the people of the earth, and so it appears that a quarter of the population of the planet will fall under the power of the rider, who is Death.

Of the means in which he brings about his destruction of humanity, John next says, "to kill with sword." The plague of the sword is mentioned first. The Greek word signifies a long and broad cutlass, but it can be used figuratively as well. The idea is that of the implements of man cutting one another down. Even nations cutting down other nations in battle would be included in the destruction. That is then followed "with hunger."

The word gives the sense of a scarcity of food, dearth, and famine. It is a natural consequence of war. The first means, the sword, leads naturally to this means. Next, it says, "with death." It is the same word as used when describing the Death above. This is death that occurs in any manner. As the other means of death are explicitly stated, this is a catchall phrase to include any manner of death that would occur along with them, but probably "pestilence" gives the sense of what can be expected. It is a natural consequence of a world filled with war, famine, and captivity.

John then finishes the terrifying thought with, "and by the beasts of the earth." This is probably to be taken in two separate ways. The first is literally. With war and depopulation, animals such as dogs and the like will become packs of killers. Other animals would also go on the offense against weakened humans.

However, with the rise of modern diseases stemming from animals – both natural and manmade – it can be assumed that things like equine encephalitis, swine flu, bird flu, mad cow disease, ebola virus, typhoid, AIDs, malaria, coronavirus, and etc., would all be a part of this type of death. The diseases of animals, jumping to humans are occurring more and more, even now. When the world is in a state of chaotic war, there will not be

the funds available to stop such outbreaks, and they will spread like lightning over the earth. They will be able to kill in the billions with little chance of containing them.

Life application: What is seen in this verse is not unlike what Jeremiah was told would come upon the people of the land for their disobedience –

> "And it shall be, if they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you shall tell them, 'Thus says the LORD:
> "Such as *are* for death, to death;
> And such as *are* for the sword, to the sword;
> And such as *are* for the famine, to the famine;
> And such as *are* for the captivity, to the captivity."'
> **3** "And I will appoint over them four forms *of destruction,*" says the LORD: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. **4** I will hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem. Jeremiah 15:2-4

What was prophesied to them is not unlike what John sees will come upon the entire world someday. Israel had forsaken the Lord their God, and they suffered because of it. Since the coming of Christ, He has been made known throughout the entire world. And the world that has rejected Him will likewise suffer.

What seems like a world of peace and prosperity right now could, within an extremely short period, turn into a world of war, famine, disease, and utter ruin. Not only could it happen, it will happen. When the rapture occurs, it will be a mere seven-year period before man, who numbers about 7 to 8 billion right now, will be brought almost to extinction. The Lord, through Isaiah, says, "I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, A man more than the golden wedge of Ophir" (Isaiah 13:12). And Jesus' own words tell us it is so –

> "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. **22** And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." Matthew 24:21-22

Only those who have called out to the Lord Jesus in faith will be taken at the rapture. Now is time to consider what the word says, to humble yourself, and to admit you are a sinner in need of a Savior. That Savior – and He alone – is JESUS!

O great God Almighty, we who know what the Bible says look with dread at what is coming upon the world. It tears at our souls that what is coming could have been avoided – simply by acknowledging Jesus as our Lord. We pray for those who have not yet accepted this truth, desiring that many will realize it before it is too late. Amen.

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. Revelation 6:9

The fifth of seven seals is broken and the resulting scene changes. The past four seals have released the four horsemen upon the earth for judgment. This verse now redirects John's attention to the altar. As it says, "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar."

The main question here concerns the identification of this altar. There are two possibilities from the Mosaic Covenant that might correspond to this altar – the brazen altar of sacrifice, or the golden altar of incense.

Almost all commentaries associate this with the brazen altar of sacrifice in the tabernacle. The reason for this is the next clause, "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain." The fact that they are slain supposedly signifies a sacrifice, and thus these are martyrs symbolically sacrificed at the brazen altar.

This sounds plausible. Vincent's Word Studies defines the words "souls" and "slain" to justify this –

Souls (ψυχὰς)

Or lives. See on 3 John 1:2. He saw only blood, but blood and life were equivalent terms to the Hebrew.

Slain (ἐσφαγμένων)

See on Revelation 5:6. The law commanded that the blood of sacrificed animals should be poured out at the bottom of the altar of burnt-offering (Leviticus 4:7).

Therefore, with such an analysis, it seems a convincing argument. This corresponds with almost all other commentaries as well. However, there is a problem with this. The sacrifices on the brazen altar pictured the coming work of Christ, not the martyrdom of

saints. To understand this, the entire book of Leviticus has been preached on by the Superior Word. Be sure to start with Chapter 1 of those sermons and proceed through the entire series. Understanding the typology will bring an understanding of what is seen here in the final book of the Bible. Every sacrifice and every part of each sacrifice pictures Christ – His work and His cross in completion of that work.

Therefore, this is not speaking of the brazen altar that is an offering to God for sin. The altar of sacrifice was used for the transference of sin from a guilty person to an innocent animal (picturing the transfer of sin from fallen man to Christ on the cross). The blood of that animal (picturing Christ) was then poured out at the base of the altar. However, the people mentioned in this verse have already transferred their sins to the Lamb of God, Jesus.

As this is so, this altar pictures the golden altar of incense. There is no altar of sacrifice in this heavenly scene because Jesus has already cleansed His people. He is the fulfillment of the necessary sacrifices for their cleansing, and He is the fulfillment of the typology of the brazen altar.

The altar here is referred to in both Revelation 8 and 9 which describes the golden altar of incense. In the tabernacle, this altar was in the Holy Place, directly before the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place where the Ark was kept. At Jesus' death, the veil (which was a representation of Christ's body – Hebrews 10:20) was rent in two (Luke 23:45) signifying full access to God through His accomplished work. In this, access to God was restored. Therefore, the altar of incense mentioned here is directly in the throne room.

These people did not die for sins, but they rather died in Christ. As it says, they were "slain for the word of God." This is the same expression used by John in Revelation 1:9. As noted then, it signifies receiving punishment because of the proclamation of the word of God.

These martyrs, the faithful disciples of Christ, proclaimed Scripture. It is this "word of God" that is deemed to be contrary to the values of those in power, and they therefore want to have it silenced. John finishes the verse with, "and for the testimony which they held." Their testimony (in Greek *marturia*, the basis for our modern word "martyr"), based on the word of God, is the proclamation of Jesus Christ. In their refusal to deny Him, and in their willingness to continue to proclaim Him, they are martyred. John will continue to describe their state in the verses ahead.

Life application: When we get to Revelation 8:3, we will read, “Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.” The incense is “the prayers of the saints.” These saints have “been slain for the word of God.” In the psalms, it says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15). The souls under this heavenly altar are eternally safe and their precious prayers are heard by the God who judges their death. He will avenge their shed blood.

Throughout the church age, people have been willing to die rather than deny Jesus. They have openly and boldly proclaimed Him. What are you willing to face for this great Creator and Redeemer who first died for you? Be prepared now to give all for Him. He is worthy of whatever you face. He is JESUS.

Lord, surely many faithful souls have been martyred over the centuries for their witness of Your wonderful work, but surely many more will die when the tribulation period starts, and when complete wickedness has taken over the world. But those who have died for the glorious name of Jesus are secure and will be secure. Their blood will be avenged. Hallelujah to the God who remembers His faithful saints! Amen.

And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Revelation 6:10

John begins the verse with, “And they cried with a loud voice.” This is referring to “the souls of those who had been slain” from the previous verse. They had held to the word of God, and they had kept their faithful testimony. Because of this, they were slain. In this, their souls cry out, “saying, How long.”

The Greek reads, “Until when.” It is as if with each succeeding person who is slain, there is another cry. “Surely, it must be time.” And then another soul is added, and the cry is, “Until when! Surely it must be time.” And another soul is added, and the cry repeats again. And the cry isn’t just one of personal woe that fades into vapor. Rather, they cry out, “O Lord, holy and true.”

Here, the term *ho Despotēs ho hagios kai alēthinos*, or the MASTER the HOLY and TRUE, is used. It is the last time that the term *despotés*, or “master,” is used in Scripture. It signifies an authority figure with complete jurisdiction and unrestricted power. There are no restraints or limitations on His authority. One can see the connection to the question “Until when?” As the Lord is completely sovereign, then He has a plan and has

determined the scope of it, including every aspect. But the souls who are added to the number don't know that plan, and so the question is made of the One who does know.

But more, in saying, "the HOLY and TRUE," it is acknowledging these qualities define who He is, and therefore there must be a reason for the death of these souls. The Holy God would not otherwise allow His saints to be so destroyed, and the God who is True would not commit any falsity. As these are understood, those who have been slain are stuck in a mental conundrum, not able to understand the perceived disparity between the two.

To understand the sentiment, one needs to look no further than those who constantly await the return of the Lord today. We look around at the world at the continuously increasing immorality, and at the wickedness that is growing exponentially, and we think, "How Long, O Lord?" We cannot see how the God who is HOLY and TRUE can allow the perversion, murder, and immorality to continue. And yet, it does. Therefore, we feel there is a disconnect between what we are seeing and experiencing, and that which should happen. This is because we are not God, and we do not have all of the information He does. And so, we must trust.

For these slain, the question to the Master is, "until you judge and avenge our blood." Here, we see that the cry is not specifically for personal vengeance, but for correcting that which is wrong. In Genesis 4:10, the Lord said to Cain –

> "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground."

Likewise, in 2 Chronicles 24:22, Zechariah cried out while being stoned –

> "The Lord look on it, and repay!"

Abel was the first martyr of the Old Testament; Zechariah was the last. There is the understanding in both that an injustice had been committed, and the Lord was aware of it and was being called to right the wrong. The blood of these souls is calling out for the same. "Our blood has been shed, it was not in accord with Your moral state, and therefore judgment is due upon the offenders."

In this, the cry is for the Avenger of their blood to take action to right the wrong. In the Old Testament, the term *gaal* was used in two ways. One was as a kinsman redeemer, and the other was as an avenger of blood. This was a next of kin who had a personal stake in either redeeming a near kin's property or in avenging the death of the near kin.

Christ fulfills both roles. He is our Redeemer, and He is our Avenger of blood. To understand this concept, one can watch or read the Ruth sermons from the Superior Word (Redeemer), and also the Numbers 35 sermons (Avenger of Blood). Together, a fuller understanding of what is occurring in this passage from Revelation will be obtained. With this in mind, the verse finishes with a request for judgment and avenging "on those who dwell on the earth?"

Here, the ungodly of the earth are being referred to. They hate the word of God, they hate the moral standard that has been set in the heart of men, and they hate those who hold to the faithful testimony of those things. They are set in contrast to those who have been martyred, and the call is for them to be judged.

As to who these souls are, there are various interpretations. Is it all of the faithful souls from Abel until the end? Is it only the Old Testament martyrs? Is it the martyrs since the inception of the church? And so on. The exact identification of them is less to be concerned over than the general precept. The blood of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord. It calls out for justice, and it will be executed. The Lord is not slack in His judgments. Rather, He has a plan, and the faithful of the world are to accept that their short-term call for justice may not necessarily be in accord with the Lord's long-term view of redemptive history.

But, to give a best analysis of who these are, each category can be considered. Is it the Old Testament martyrs? Probably not. Jesus said this to the leaders of Israel –

> "Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and persecute,' **50** that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, **51** from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation." Luke 11:49-51

Is it those who are martyred during the church age? Probably not. Paul says that all of the dead in Christ, and those who are alive at the coming of Christ, will be taken at the rapture. Any who were martyred during the church age will be vindicated through Christ's call to the church at the rapture. It is its own form of judgment upon the world.

Understanding this, and as the events of Revelation are focused on the tribulation period, this is more surely referring to those who are martyred during that period. They will be willing to give up their lives for the testimony of Christ. And there will be many of

them, as is testified to in the coming chapters. But Christ will avenge their blood in due time.

Life application: The Lord is the Avenger of Blood. The avenger had the responsibility to take the life of the person who killed a near relative, willingly or by accident, but provisions were also set up to protect the person who killed unintentionally. However, when the murder was intentional, "The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death" (Numbers 35:19).

As noted, the *gaal* is the same term applied to the kinsman redeemer and the avenger of blood. Jesus is both to us because He is our nearest relative. The people, as it said in the previous verse, were martyrs – thus implying that they were God's witnesses of Jesus Christ. They are saved believers, either anticipating the coming of Christ, or who proclaim that Christ has come (as noted above, surely the latter – tribulation saints). Because of this, they are to be avenged. Their cry of "How long?" is one also seen several times in the Old Testament.

Isaiah wanted to know how long he had to witness to the people of Israel. Zechariah asked the Lord how long He would withhold His mercy from Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah. And Daniel cried out to God wanting to know how long until the visions he was given would come to pass. The Lord is working on His own timetable, and we must be patient as we wait on His plans.

These martyrs in Revelation call out to the Lord with a rare word that signifies a master with full and absolute authority. In this, they are recognizing Christ's divine authority to judge. And He will. This verse is one that pleads for the people of the Lord to allow Him to conduct His affairs according to His wisdom. He will not let any wrong deed go unpunished, and He will work in the most effective manner to receive the full glory that He is due. He will also receive the greatest praises from His people when they see His effective hand of completing the redemptive narrative. He is all wise, and He is fully capable of completing the task set before Him. He is JESUS!

Lord Jesus, it is comforting to know that You are our Avenger and that You will surely judge any who come against us. It is also comforting to know that You are our closest relative, even closer than a brother. You are our glorious Kinsman Redeemer and You have paid the ransom price for our souls with Your own precious blood. Thank You, O Lord! Amen.

Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number* of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed. Revelation 6:11

The words here still refer to those first mentioned in verse 6:9. They are those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony they held. Their cry went forth asking when their blood would be avenged. In response, this verse is given, saying, "Then a white robe was given to each of them."

The word for "robe" is *stolé*. It speaks of a long robe worn by the upper class in the Middle East. When seen, it reflected people of high station and wealth. It was also used as a special festal robe. Here, the white is signifying righteousness, and the style of robe is reflecting their high status because of their willingness to die for the truth of God in Christ.

In verse 4:4, the twenty-four elders were said to be clothed in white robes. Likewise, in verse 19:8, it says –

> "And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

The general symbolism is found here, but with the note of the particular type of robe. This certainly highlights their martyrdom as worthy of special note. As Charles Ellicott says, "Persecuted on earth, they are honoured in heaven." This particular type will be noted three times in Chapter 7, and once in Revelation 22:14 (depending on the source text used).

The sixth chapter of Revelation corresponds to the sixth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The sixth letter, *vav*, pictures a tent peg, and it signifies "secure." Here, the martyrs of the tribulation are given white robes, signifying the righteousness of Christ, and that they are eternally secure in Him.

After receiving their robes, John notes, "and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer."

These words are given in response to their cry of the previous verse, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" The answer is for them to "...rest a little while longer." It is a way of saying, "Let God unfold His plan accordingly. All will be made right, and in the meantime, rest." In this, it isn't just a rest from their cries, but a rest which is in peace and without any further

cares. As Matthew Poole says, “That they should rest yet for a little season; that they should be satisfied, and acquiesce in God’s dispensations.”

And there is a reason for this. God does, in fact, have a set plan which is “until both *the number* of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed.” The word translated as “completed” is *pléroó*. It signifies filling to capacity. There is a set amount that will meet an end purpose, and until that amount is reached, the purpose has not been met. One could think of a scale weighing out gold. The target weight is 44 grams. Until that amount is met, the adding of grains is not fulfilled. So it is with God’s plans for the martyred of the tribulation period.

A concrete example of this type of addition is found in Romans –

> 25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest
> you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to
> Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. **26** And so all Israel will be
> saved, as it is written:
> “The Deliverer will come out of Zion,
> And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
> **27** For this *is* My covenant with them,
> When I take away their sins.” Romans 11:25-27

God’s dispensational model clearly reveals that He still has a plan and a purpose for Israel, but that plan includes Israel’s partial blindness until a set number of Gentiles has been filled up (*pléróma*). Likewise, Paul says –

> “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens
> with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** having been built on the
> foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief
> corner*stone,* **21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a
> holy temple in the Lord, **22** in whom you also are being built together for
> a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22

In Paul’s (and also Peter’s) words, it notes that believers are being built into a building. Having a building implies having someone who has planned that building. Every detail of a building is first laid out by an architect, even down to the last amount of wire, tile, or mortar. In this, God has a set plan, and that plan is being worked out in the stream of human existence. Until the details of that plan have been met, we are to patiently wait.

What is important to remember is that God is not indifferent to the slaying of His people. However, because they are His people, they will ultimately be with Him forever. As Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life."

Because we are in physical bodies, it is our point of reference. We look to the flesh as that which is essential and of the highest value. But this is an error in thinking. Trusting in Christ as these martyrs did, even to death, does not mean the end. Rather, it is only a step to that which is truly life.

Life application: The granting of these garments has symbolism that reaches all the way back to Genesis 3:21 where "for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them." This was done only after Adam demonstrated faith in the promise of a Redeemer to come.

By naming his wife "Eve," he indicated his belief in the promises of God; Eve means "life." This pattern continues without wavering throughout the Bible. Only when faith in God and His promises are made can anyone be clothed, or covered, by Him. This clothing then signifies that a right relationship with God has been restored. Before that time, a person is separated from Him because of his sins. However, when we demonstrate faith in God's word, we move from a position of guilt to a state where we are free from guilt. In essence, God bestows upon us the righteousness of Jesus Christ, symbolized by the white robe.

Isaiah speaks of this blessed state –

> "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
> My soul shall be joyful in my God;
> For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
> He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
> As a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments,
> And as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels." Isaiah 61:10

These martyrs of the tribulation period have demonstrated faith, even to the point of death, and they can now rest in the eternal security which is the reward of this faith.

For His people of Israel, Jesus spoke of this trial that would be faced during the tribulation –

> "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. **17** And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. **18** But not a hair of your head shall be lost. **19** By your patience possess your souls." Luke 21:16-19

Obviously, if someone had been put to death and yet "not a hair of your head shall be lost," then Jesus was speaking of the eternally secure state of these martyrs.

Despite the bloodbath of this horrific period, there is an appointed end to the death and destruction. God knows, in advance, how many will be martyred. When that number is complete, He will act by sending Jesus back to reign from His throne in Jerusalem. As this is so, and as these things are certain and known to God – in each dispensation of time – then why would we worry about the temporary trials and troubles we face? Let us trust God to deliver us from whatever trouble or trial we now experience. He is faithful and He will deliver. He is JESUS.

Lord God, in Your word, there are many passages about martyrdom for your people. And yet, they are – at the same time – words of comfort and assurance. You have promised that You have us safely in Your care, and that because of Jesus, we will receive the eternal inheritance of everlasting life. We can look to Your word and then to the future and have nothing to fear. You have everything under control. We are secure in Christ. Hallelujah and Amen.

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. Revelation 6:12

John's attention is now redirected once again with the breaking of the next seal. The first four seals dealt with the judgments upon the earth, symbolized by the four horsemen. The fifth seal took us to the heavenly altar and the souls of those who were martyred for faith in Christ during those judgments. John is now directed back to the earth and the "two great lights" of Genesis 1, the sun and the moon. The scene begins with, "I looked when He opened the sixth seal."

A new judgment is coming. Whether these judgments are chronological or not is debated, but probably not. Each is simply something that occurs during the tribulation period, and it is introduced in a logical sequence for the reader to understand. For example, it is certain that the consequences of the four horsemen will fill the entire tribulation period. For now, however, John is directed to the events surrounding this sixth seal, saying, "and behold, there was a great earthquake."

The word translated as “earthquake” is *seismos*. It signifies a shaking, or even a storm (as in Matthew 8:24). Despite being a “shaking,” the translation of “earthquake” is certainly correct. The Bible records several earthquakes in the past and in the future. One such example is found in Ezekiel 38 –

> “‘And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘*that* My fury will show in My face. **19** For in My jealousy *and* in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: “Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel, **20** so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who *are* on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.”’” Ezekiel 38:18-20

The timing of earthquakes, such as the one in Ezekiel, is propitiously placed when redemptive events occur. One of the most notably propitious timings of all such events in human history is found in Matthew 27 –

> “Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, **52** and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; **53** and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”
>
> -Matthew 27:51-53

Another such event is prophesied to occur at Christ’s second coming when His feet stand on the Mount of Olives. At that time, it will be split in two according to Zechariah 14:4. God’s purposes for moving history along in a predetermined manner include His use of the elements to affect those purposes.

John next says, “and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.” It is two separate things, but they are the result of one event. Because the events are mentioned after the earthquake, this terminology is surely to be taken literally. What is most likely being described is an earthquake large enough to cause volcanoes or some other natural disaster that will spew great volumes of dust and debris into the atmosphere. This will cause the darkening of the sun during the day and the moon looking red like blood at night.

This is seen at times from other such events. Sandstorms from Africa will cause the sun and moon to darken over the United States. The oil fields burning during the Iraq war

caused this to occur for an extended period of time in many parts of the world, and so on.

As the events of the Bible are generally surrounding the Middle East, it is certain that this is the view that will be seen from there, and particularly in Israel. Based on the terminology in the rest of this chapter, it is likely that this will not be isolated to the Middle East though, but it could possibly encompass the whole earth. Such an event is prophesied by Christ Jesus in Matthew 24 –

> "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30** Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **31** And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."
>
> -Matthew 24:29-31

The two accounts between Matthew and Revelation parallel exactingly. The events of the first five loosing of the seals closely match the events Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24 that precede His coming as prophesied there. The words of Matthew 24 match the verses here in Revelation 6. And so, even if not completely chronological in the opening of the seals, they do follow the overall pattern of what Jesus first spoke of to Israel.

Life application: The events spoken by Jesus in Matthew 24 were spoken to Israel, under the law, and in anticipation of events in their history leading up to the kingdom age. Christ was not speaking to the Gentile-led church, and it is not until Acts 10 that it was even known that Gentiles would be a part of what was going on. And, not until the introduction of Paul was this mystery most fully understood (e.g., see Ephesians 3:1-7).

The events of Revelation that parallel the events of Matthew 24 are directed to Israel during the tribulation period, not to the church – which has been taken out at the rapture. In mixing dispensations, one will always (not sometimes, but always) have confused theology. There will be contradictions that are not resolvable because the events and theology for the various dispensations apply only to those dispensations.

All of Scripture is useful for the disciple of Christ to understand the redemptive narrative, but not all of Scripture is directed to everyone at all times. Have sound theology, keep things in context, and do not mix theology between dispensations. In this, you will do well, and your eschatology will be sound.

For example, in Acts 2, Peter speaks of the sun turning into darkness and the moon into blood. His words are quoting Joel chapter 2, and they are applied to Pentecost in the year of the resurrection of Jesus in a symbolic fashion, but this isn't a full picture of what Peter was speaking about.

Instead, he was saying these things would come because of Jesus' completed work, but not that they had necessarily come in their fullness at that time. The context of Peter's words must be evaluated based on the original prophecy in Joel. Further, they must be evaluated based on who Peter was speaking to – the Jewish people only. Some of those events are future to us, even now, and they will be fully realized after the rapture of the church, in and through the people of Israel.

How great and wonderful You are, O God. You have given us a look into future events and what is coming upon the whole world. And, You have also given us the way to avoid being caught up in them – by calling on Jesus now. Help us to focus our thoughts, hearts, and minds on Jesus and to tell His message to others before that Day comes. Amen.

And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Revelation 6:13

The previous verse spoke of a great earthquake and the darkening of the sun and the moon. The events continue in the heavens in this verse where John says, "And the stars of heaven fell to the earth." The symbolism that was presented by the Lord in Matthew 24:29 continues here. There, He said, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven."

Concerning these stars, there are two general ways the words are interpreted. The first is that these are literal meteors in the heavens falling to earth, which to John would appear as stars. This then could indicate the timing of the surrounding events – such as during a Perseid or Leonid meteor shower.

This would be perfectly in line with the symbolism of the sun and moon being darkened in the preceding verse and the earthquake before that – each of which is plausible and likely if the events are to be taken literally. If this natural explanation is correct, it is important to remember that the Bible, at times, describes events as they would appear to the spectator, not in scientifically accurate terms.

However, there is a second option as well. It could be that the stars are references to people in high positions, religious or otherwise. This terminology is used elsewhere in the Bible, such as in Daniel 8:10 –

> "And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down *some* of the host and *some* of the stars to the ground, and trampled them."

The symbolism of stars being equated to rulers or leaders is found elsewhere as well. In Numbers 24:17, there is a prophecy that says, "A Star shall come out of Jacob." That is then defined by the next clause, saying, "A Scepter shall rise out of Israel." It is a messianic prophecy of the coming Messiah. Later, in Isaiah 17, the "day star" of verse 12 is referred to. In verse 13, he then says, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God."

Such references (and others) are to leaders, religious or civil. If this is the correct interpretation, then the symbolism appears to be that the religious leaders are abandoning their religious allegiances and focusing on the anti-Christ.

Not only then is military power being solidified, but also the religious activities of the world are being brought into one large body of apostasy, of which Israel participates. As this is during the tribulation period, Israel's final seven years under the law (Daniel 9:24-27), this allegorical meaning is quite likely. With this in mind, John then says, "as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind."

The symbolism here continues in Matthew 24:29 (cited above) in its final clause –

> "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, <u>and the powers of the heavens will be shaken</u>."

An early description of these events (the stars of heaven falling to the earth and the fig tree dropping its late figs) is found in Isaiah 34. There, it says –

> "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved,
> And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll;
> All their host shall fall down
> As the leaf falls from the vine,
> And as *fruit* falling from a fig tree." Isaiah 34:4

This then is to be taken together with Jesus' words of Matthew 24 –

> "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near. **33** So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! **34** Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. **35** Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Matthew 24:32-35

Jesus speaks of the fig tree being tender and sprouting. At that time, the events of these terrible times will begin to come to pass. What the fig symbolizes, then, must be determined. It was first mentioned in the Garden of Eden. After the fall, it says –

> "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings." Genesis 3:7

The fig, or *teenah* in Hebrew, can be seen here and elsewhere to signify a connection to God or a disconnect from Him. Jesus provided a clue of this symbolism when He cursed the fig tree in Mark 11 –

> "Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. **13** And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. **14** In response Jesus said to it, 'Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.'" Mark 11:12-14

He was making a living parable of the cutting off of the spiritual connection to God through the ineffective temple worship. No fruit was borne through it, and it was to be terminated. Thus, Jesus' words of Matthew 24 are saying that there will be a time when the spiritual connection to God is blossoming. However, that will be terminated as prophesied with the words "the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs."

The temple that is supposed to bring a reconnection to the Lord will fail to do so. Only by coming to God through Christ can this truly come about.

<u>Life application:</u> What is written in the Bible is from our human perspective. Even in modern times we do this, such as saying, "The sun will rise at 7:10 am." The sun doesn't actually rise, but from our perspective it does. Therefore, the Bible cannot be accused of dishonesty when otherwise odd pronouncements are made, such as stars of heaven falling to earth. They are for the benefit of the reader.

Therefore, even if they appear as "stars" to John's eyes, they can simply be meteors. However, the symbolic typology is more likely concerning what is referred to here. It is speaking of rulers who are supposed to be exalted, but who instead are disgraced.

Either way, literally or symbolically, the world is in its tailspin and the events are on a global scale. These things will be fully understood only after they come to pass, but there is enough information provided now to give us insights into what is coming. The only way to not be swept up in the catastrophes that lie ahead is to accept the gospel now and to call out to Jesus. It is He who is the true Star that blazes brightly from the throne of God. He is our great Lord and Savior. He is JESUS.

Thank You, Lord, for allowing us to peer into the future events prophesied in Your word and to see what is coming. Although we may struggle with individual interpretations, we know the overall outcome. It is wonderful to know that you have complete control over the future and that we are already safe in You. Glory be to You, O God. Amen.

Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. Revelation 6:14

In the comments of the previous verse, it was seen that Isaiah 34:4 matched the content of the verse. It spoke of the stars of heaven falling to the earth, and the fig dropping its late figs. Here, the same verse from Isaiah also matches what is stated in this verse –

> "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved,
> And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll;
> All their host shall fall down
> As the leaf falls from the vine,
> And as *fruit* falling from a fig tree." Isaiah 34:4

Understanding this, John begins his words of this verse, saying, "Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up." The idea here isn't that these things will literally occur, but the terminology is saying that like a scroll is rolled up, so will the order of things that currently exist be so completely removed.

One can lay out a scroll and read its contents, seeing all that is displayed there. If the scroll has notes of love and joy, that will be seen. If the scroll has notes of hatred, war, and wickedness, that can be read. But when a scroll is rolled up, all of what is written there will be drawn away from the eyes. Thus, a completely new order of things can then be introduced.

However, if these words are to be taken literally, one would have to consider that the events being viewed are from a man's perspective. The sky receding like a scroll could be a result of the earthquake previously noted. Just as when there is a nuclear detonation where the sky appears to roll up, this earthquake could be so large and so widespread that it will affect the atmosphere of the earth. Side effects of earthquakes are numerous and so this is not at all implausible.

If a literal rendering of this is assumed, the cataclysm to come will cause such a tectonic disturbance that even, as John says, "every mountain and island was moved out of its place." An earthquake great enough could cause damage on a global scale with giant tsunamis, volcanoes, and the like. Again, the description is not impossible when considered from the view of a man looking at the destruction around him.

But the symbolism here could also be taken symbolically. Just as the stars of the previous verse are shown elsewhere in Scripture to indicate human rulers, so mountains are shown to be reflective of governments. In Isaiah 11, and elsewhere, Jerusalem is equated to a mountain. Jeremiah 52:25 calls Babylon a "destroying mountain." The islands of the sea are equated to jurisdictions belonging to larger governmental bodies, such as in Esther 10:1.

Such references show that the events of this verse in Revelation may be speaking of a complete change in the moral and governmental order of things as they now exist. And, indeed, this is what is said to have been set into motion at the first coming of Christ Jesus. Luke cites Isaiah 40:3-5 when speaking of John the Baptist's ministry which was given to prepare the way for the coming of Christ –

> "The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
> 'Prepare the way of the LORD;
> Make His paths straight.
> **5** Every valley shall be filled
> And every mountain and hill brought low;
> The crooked places shall be made straight
> And the rough ways smooth;
> **6** And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" Luke 3:4-6

Without being dogmatic concerning a literal fulfillment of these things that John writes in Revelation, they are certainly symbolically fulfilled as well. The apocalyptic nature of the account leaves open either or both options to come about. The certainty, however, is that when the events are fulfilled, they shall be known to be their fulfillment at the time.

For example, when Christ came, the literal mountains and hills of the world were not brought low, and yet, we know that the government of Christ on earth had begun and that the terminology clearly pointed to Him and His ministry being superior to all other forms of government. The final fulfillment of His redemptive plan had been set into motion, and the subjects of His kingdom are – even now – being gathered together.

Life application: A global restructuring – either literal or symbolic or both – is coming. It will shake the very foundations of all of human society, and it will certainly cause immense economic and national upheaval.

But they are all a part of the events leading to the millennial reign of Christ. Before that time, such global devastation is coming on the earth, and most will not survive the events. For those who have put their faith in Christ Jesus, we need not worry about the details provided here. We are safe in Christ, and we are safely kept in His firm grasp.

Let us live for Him because He is worthy of our attention, devotion, and love. He is our Redeemer, and He is coming to save His people. He is JESUS.

Lord, we know that the disasters coming on the earth that are prophesied in Your word are both natural and man-made. Together they are leading to a cumulative effect of woe and misery for those who must face them. Use us, O Lord, as instruments of Your good news now, so that many will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus before the time of tribulation. Help us to be responsible to speak to others about the gospel that saves. Amen.

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, Revelation 6:15

The words of the previous verses described the scene of the world coming apart at its seams – an earthquake, the stars falling, the sky receding, mountains and islands being removed from their places. Now, John describes the effects upon man who dwells on this trembling earth. They will do their own trembling.

In his words, he will provide a list of seven categories of men. The list is intended to be an all-inclusive list. As a side note, the list does vary between manuscripts by either changing the order or the word used to describe a certain category. However, the changes are minimal. In the end, it is a list intended to convey the idea of the complete range of categories of men.

A list from the society at the time of Isaiah, as seen in Isaiah 3, follows a similar thought to John's words here in the New Testament –

> "The mighty man and the man of war,
> The judge and the prophet,
> And the diviner and the elder;
> **3** The captain of fifty and the honorable man,
> The counselor and the skillful artisan,
> And the expert enchanter." Isaiah 3:2, 3

The words of Revelation identify the categories according to the Greek descriptions of men. Understanding this, John begins the verse by saying, "And the kings of the earth." These are those leaders who have sovereign authority over their lands. Even today, kings reign in countries of the world. The Greek word is derived from a root signifying a foundation of power. Such men sit in authority over their domains.

Next are "the great men." These would be comparable to our presidents, prime ministers, dictators, etc. They are those who were elected to office or who gained their rule through force, but who are not considered kings. Outside of Revelation, the word is only found in Mark 6:21 where it is variously translated as "lords," "great men," "nobles," and etc.

Next are "the rich men." This category of men is obvious even in today's world. They are people who have immense wealth and can wield that wealth behind the scenes to bring about their agendas. They have authority in media and access to their leaders in a way that others don't.

John next identifies "the commanders." These are known in Greek as *chiliarchs*. They are high military officers who exercise the military powers of their nations. Some manuscripts reverse the order of "the rich men" and "the commanders."

The next category is "the mighty men." The Greek reads *dunatos*, meaning powerful or capable. As a man, he is a powerful warrior. Here, some manuscripts say *ischuros* instead of *dunatos*. It is another word that signifies a mighty or powerful warrior. These words refer to people who exercise power that is not specifically military in nature, and yet their power is of great strength – lower levels of governmental authority, industry, etc. may fall under this term.

From there, John notes "every slave." The word is *doulos*, and it signifies a bond man or a slave. It is a designation of anyone who generally exerts himself and his efforts on

behalf of another. This can be applied to servants, but it surely even extends to blue-collar workers who are kept in the bonds of low-level work just to make ends meet.

The last of the seven refers to "every free man." The Greek word is *eleutheros*. It signifies free, delivered from obligation, exempt, uninhibited, and so on. This would then apply to the rest of the people on earth – self-employed, small business owners, even the retired who are living in an uninhibited way.

Of this all-inclusive list of men, it says they "hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains." The words take the reader back to Isaiah 2. There he says –

> "They shall go into the holes of the rocks,
> And into the caves of the earth,
> From the terror of the LORD
> And the glory of His majesty,
> When He arises to shake the earth mightily." Isaiah 2:19

A similar sentiment is repeated in Isaiah 2:21 speaking of the "clefts of the rocks" and the "crags of the rugged rocks." When the great cataclysm mentioned in the preceding verses occurs, all will know that God is sovereign over His creation. All of their power, position, and wealth won't be able to save them in that time. They will hide themselves in terror from what is coming upon them.

Life application: In Ecclesiastes, we are told that things repeat themselves and that there is nothing new under the sun. Going back to Isaiah, we see that this is true. Man fails to learn, and the cycles of horror that come upon him repeat themselves. The Bible tells us of these things to wake us up to the nature of the Lord and the terror that will come upon us if we reject Him.

Unfortunately, the world looks at God as a cosmic pushover who overlooks sin, will accept any path to Him, and maybe grades man on some type of bell curve. As most people think they are better than the next guy, the bell curve of being on God's good side is always perceived to be true of each individual.

But God has spoken. He does not overlook sin, He has provided one and only one path of restoration, and there is only one grade that is acceptable – absolute perfection. And the only way to obtain each of these aspects of what is required is to come to Him through Jesus Christ. Through Him, sin is forgiven. In Him is the one path to the Father. And because of His imputed righteousness, man is once again deemed pure and spotless before God. Come to God through His offer of reconciliation. Come today to JESUS.

Lord, thank You that the rapture means that Your redeemed will be spared from the terrifying calamities to come. Even the great and mighty will be fearful and hide at what is coming, but we who have Christ will be secure in Your glorious presence through it all. Thank You Lord God! Amen.

and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! Revelation 6:16

To remember the context, the previous verse needs to be cited as well –

> "And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, **16** and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

The words here are cited first from Hosea 10 –

> "Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel,
> Shall be destroyed.
> The thorn and thistle shall grow on their altars;
> They shall say to the mountains, 'Cover us!"
> And to the hills, 'Fall on us!'" Hosea 10:8

Jesus then cited that passage (Luke 23:30) to the women of Jerusalem as He was being taken out to be crucified. Here in Revelation, the people, from the greatest to the least, are hiding in the caves and rocks of the mountains. In this state, John continues, saying, "and said to the mountains and the rocks."

The words of Hosea called out for death rather than life because of the terror of the situation the people faced. Jesus says the same thing would come upon the people of Israel when they were to be destroyed in the siege of the land by the Romans. Thus, this is a proverbial statement that is used for times of absolute calamity.

John uses this to show the state of the entire world during the seven years of tribulation that lie ahead. The people will be so terrified that they will call out to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne." The one who sits on the throne is Christ Jesus, the divine Word of God.

Three times in the book of Hebrews, it says that Jesus "sat down" –

> * who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (1:3)
>
> * But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, (10:12)
>
> * looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Saying that He is at God's right hand means that He is in the position of total power and authority. To sit at the right hand of the throne of God means it is He who is on the throne. Thus, the people of the world will know that it is He who they have rejected, and they will attempt to hide from Him, even seeking to be covered by the rocks and the mountains. Then to parallel what was just said, it restates Christ's ability to bring judgment, saying, "and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

The statement is paradoxical in nature. A lamb is considered the gentlest of farm animals, and it is the one that needs protection from its surroundings, and even from its own self – being too simple to tend to itself properly. And yet, the Lamb is the one whose wrath they flee from. This is because it is the humanity of Christ Jesus who suffered and died on the cross. Verse 5:5 shows that it is His sacrifice that qualifies Him to open the seals. It is He who has the authority to loose the seals, and in loosing the seals, it is He who then brings forth the wrath of God upon the world.

The world will realize that in rejecting Jesus Christ, and His offer of peace with God, only wrath, indignation, and judgment is left. For them, there will be a double terror. They will not only face His wrath in their earthly lives as they are destroyed among the nations, but they will again face His judgment at the great white throne before they are cast into the Lake of Fire.

Knowing that there is no hope for having rejected Him, it is no wonder that they would want the rocks and mountains to fall on them. There is no place safe from the coming wrath and no place that the Lord's eyes don't roam. Understanding this, there is a parallel in the book of Joshua –

> "But these five kings had fled and hidden themselves in a cave at Makkedah. **17** And it was told Joshua, saying, 'The five kings have been found hidden in the cave at Makkedah.'

[18] So Joshua said, ‘Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and set men by it to guard them.’” Joshua 10:17, 18

These kings hid, just as the kings of the earth will hide in the future time of tribulation, but they know they cannot hide securely. With no other alternative, they call out to the mountains and rocks. Instead of making a plea to the Creator of the rocks before taking the mark of the beast, they now simply ask nature to hide them. But then in a typical contradictory process, they acknowledge who they are hiding from… the Creator.

It is confused thinking by a confused generation that will deny the Creator while simultaneously acknowledging Him. But this is exactly how the world is turning, even now. Peter explains what this means in his first epistle –

“For the eyes of the Lord *are* on the righteous,
And His ears *are open* to their prayers;
But the face of the Lord *is* against those who do evil.” 1 Peter 3:12

They know that their lives have been conducted in evil, and they know that what is happening is just and deserved, and so they call out to a secondary force, nature, to hide them from the ultimate force – the wrath of the Lamb.

As a note of doctrine, in order to justify a “prewrath” rapture, it is common to divide up the wrath of these seven years into two periods. This is known as the “prewrath” view. In order to substantiate this concept, and using the words of this verse in Revelation 6 (among other points), this is stated in the commentary from the prewrath view on Wikipedia –

“A side-to-side comparison of the wording of the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12–13) and the signs in Matthew 24:29 announcing the Second Coming of Jesus and the rapture of the Church indicate that they are the same event. Immediately after the sixth seal is opened in Revelation 6:12, the people of the earth, "said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (the Lamb being Jesus Christ), indicating that they are viewing Jesus in the clouds. Since all of the people on earth (every slave and every free man) are crying out because of the wrath of God, this implies that all those on earth are unbelievers, and that the believers have already been raptured. Therefore, the rapture in Matthew 24:29–31 occurs after the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12-13), but before the seventh seal of God's wrath (Revelation 8:1). The church is said to be in heaven as the great multitude (Revelation 7:1 ff.), which has "come out of great tribulation" (Revelation 7:9–17).”

This analysis would then mean that all of the saints of all of church history had "come out of great tribulation," meaning the first three years of the tribulation period. It completely ignores the fact that an innumerable number of people that are raptured, meaning the dead in Christ of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, were never a part of the tribulation period. This view further mixes dispensations, assuming that "the elect" of Matthew 24 are those of the church, and that Jesus is referring to the rapture in that passage. Both are incorrect.

The various views – mid-trib, prewrath, and post-trib – fail to properly treat the timeline given by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2. They also fail to acknowledge that Jesus never spoke of the rapture of the church. Rather, that was a "mystery" revealed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, some thirty-plus years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Mixing dispensations, as these views do, leaves a contradictory and convoluted eschatology concerning the rapture of the church and other end times events.

Life application: Don't mix dispensations.

Lord, surely we think unclearly about who You are and what You have done for us. Instead of holding fast to You and acknowledging you now, we live our lives in selfish pursuit and reckless abandon. But You are holy and deserving of so much more. Forgive us for our transgressions and give us the heart and desire to serve You now and always. Amen.

For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" Revelation 6:17

There is an emphasis in the Greek that is missing in this translation. It literally says, "the day, the great." Thus, a rendering such as the Weymouth Version is appropriate. In that translation, the emphasis is rendered almost as a proper name –

> "for the day of His anger--that great day--has come, and who is able to stand?"

Also, some Greek translations say "their" while others say "His." As two entities are referred to in the previous verse (the one on the throne and the Lamb), the word "their" is fine. But because they are both manifestations of Christ, saying "His" is fine as well. Either way, the time of the Lord's wrath is what is being spoken of.

With these variations noted, John says (using the Weymouth Version), "for the day of His anger--that great day--has come." The Lamb who was crucified for the sins of the world has been rejected. His church has been taken home, and worldwide enmity

towards Him and His gospel of peace is left. Because of this, only His anger can be poured out on those who have failed to believe. The love seen in the shed blood is now anger towards the rejection of that offering.

With the coming of this great day in mind, a question is presented, “and who is able to stand?” If the One on the throne has presented the Lamb, and the Lamb is rejected, then what shall be the end of those who have rejected Him? The question is being raised based on the categories given in verse 15. There are the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man. Who can stand before the Lamb?

The answer is given in Chapter 7, and it involves two separate categories who will be presented there.

Life application: There are verses in the Bible that seem to contain oxymorons because they don’t fit our thinking of how things are. For example, each in Christ is asked to be a “living sacrifice.” A sacrifice, by its very nature, is something that dies. Someone not understanding the significance of the Christian life cannot grasp such a concept. But the informed believer knows that we are to be “dead to sin,” and to offer our lives to God apart from the body of sin and death that is in the world and which is in our flesh.

Likewise, we have here what would otherwise be considered an oxymoron – the wrath of the Lamb. How can a lamb demonstrate wrath? For some, even the “wrath of God” makes no sense. They can only see the Creator as a big fluffy pushover who dotes on us and gives us candy and prosperity. But God is holy. Our sin, no matter how small, is an affront to God. Multiply that by the billions of people on earth who have rejected Him, and His righteousness demands justice.

God doesn’t change during this process. Think of a column that is fixed and unmoving. On one side of the column is written “peace” and on the other side is written “strife.” If you are on the “peace” side, then peace reigns down on you, but if you move to the “strife” side, then you have become the object of punishment and pain. This is how we interact with God. We change in relation to Him; He does not change in position to us. When we are covered in Christ, we are on the “peace” side, but without His covering, we remain on the “strife” side.

As we are at strife with God because of original sin, we can never again be on His good side by anything we do. It is an eternal change, and only an eternal correction – one from outside of the created order – can rectify the situation. This is Jesus. He is the payment for an infinite crime of sinning against an infinite Creator.

In the tribulation, the world will have rejected Jesus and therefore it will taste the fruits of that rejection – the wrath of the Lamb. One cannot be right with God without accepting Jesus Christ. He is "the way, the truth, and the life." No one comes to the Father except through Him. He is the path to reconciliation with our Creator. He is JESUS.

Lord God, it is certain that a finite crime against You bears an infinite penalty. It is certain that we can never pay the fine necessary to be right with You. But we know that Jesus could – He is fully God and fully Man, and He is qualified to do so. May we be wise and accept His payment on our behalf. Thank You for the Lamb of God; thank You for Jesus! Amen.

CHAPTER 7

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Revelation 7:1

The words now arrive at the beginning of Chapter 7, and immediately there arrives a brief interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. “After these things” shows a progression of thought and time. And so, what is coming now is sequential to what has occurred with the other seals. Whether it is sequential to John only, meaning he is being shown these things one at a time even though they overlap, or whether the events of the opening of this seal are sequential to the previous ones is uncertain. However, the events coming through verse 8 are most likely at the beginning of the tribulation period and so the first option seems correct.

With this option probable, one can see the error in thinking of those who hold to a “mid-tribulation,” or “pre-wrath” (or even post-tribulation, and etc.), view of the events. Taking these events as purely chronological in order to justify one’s position on the timing of the rapture is unsound. Rather, the scenes are most probably categorical, even if some logically happen in a chronological order (such as the releasing of the four horsemen).

The proper way to evaluate the timing of the rapture is to do so from the writings of Paul who first conveyed the mystery of the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51), and who then further explained the timing of eschatological events in 1 & 2 Thessalonians. To understand the timing of those events, a short explanation was given on the Superior Word commentary of Revelation 6:2.

With this understanding, John begins with, “After these things.” This most likely means, “After the things I just saw,” not “And what will occur in the future will happen after the things that have been seen.” This is the next logical event to be revealed as a category. In this, John says, “I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth.”

This is not intended to mean that the Bible proclaims a square earth, it doesn’t. In Isaiah 40:22 the Bible speaks of the “circle of the earth,” meaning an orb, not a cube or flat square. In the book of Job, the Bible says that the Lord “hangs the earth on nothing.” The four winds then, like other references in the Bible, merely speak of the four general directions of the earth; not set points.

John says these angels are "holding the four winds of the earth." As is consistent, the number four here matches the overall use of it in Scripture. The number is defined by EW Bullinger saying –

"Creation is therefore the next thing—the *fourth* thing, and the number *four* always has reference to all that is *created*. It is emphatically the *number of Creation*; of man in his relation to the world as created; while *six* is the number of man in his opposition to and independence of God. It is the number of things that have a beginning, of things that are made, of material things, and matter itself. It is the number of *material completeness*. Hence it is the *world number*, and especially the 'city' number."

In this, one can see that the "world number," four, fits exactingly into what is being described. Next, the word "holding" comes from the Greek word *krateó*. It signifies holding firmly. There is a restraining power that is being directed.

These winds are certainly from the perspective of the land of Israel, or more specifically in relation to the people of Israel. That will be seen in the coming verses. They are forces that affect the peoples of the world in a negative manner. Thus, holding them back allegorically provides a temporary restraining of the events. Quite a few references in the Old Testament substantiate this. In Daniel 7, we read –

> "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea." Daniel 7:2

There, the Great Sea is the mass of humanity, and the winds are what churn and rile them up. Another example of the winds affecting the people is found in Jeremiah, where it is used metaphorically to scatter Israel –

> "I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy;
> I will show them the back and not the face
> In the day of their calamity." Jeremiah 18:17

They are also used to scatter the other peoples of the world, such as –

> "Against Elam I will bring the four winds
> From the four quarters of heaven,
> And scatter them toward all those winds;
> There shall be no nations where the outcasts of Elam will not go." Jeremiah 49:36

A "destroying wind" is even said to have come against Babylon (Jeremiah 51:1) in the day of her doom. With this symbolism defined from the Old Testament typology, John

continues his words, saying, “that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.”

The meaning here is explained by the next verse where another angel will imply that the winds now being held back are destroying winds, but they are not to be released until a particular matter is resolved on earth. Once that is accomplished, the winds will be unleashed to consummate their intended purposes.

Life application: The vision that John is seeing is telling the people of the world that there will be a time of calm before the storm of chaos and destruction. This restive period was seen by Zechariah hundreds of years before John received his vision –

> “We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly.” Zechariah 1:11

Unfortunately, for those who experience this time of calm, it will assuredly lead them into a false sense that all is ok with the world. Whatever happened at the supposed “rapture” of the Christian church will be explained away through the strong delusion prophesied by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:11. It will supposedly be a time to get on with life and all will be fine.

Such however will not be the case. The world will devolve into a calamitous sea of chaos, mayhem, anarchy, and death. This is the cost of refusing to be included in what God offers now through His gospel of peace. It is available today, and it comes through the glorious giving of our Lord and Savior. He is JESUS!

Lord God, after the rapture of the church, the world will believe it has the peace it seeks, and the people will delude themselves by it. Even today, we rage against You and look to cast off Your sovereign rule. Forgive our stubborn and rebellious hearts, and help us to hold fast and faithfully to You. No matter what is coming, those who have called on You through Christ Jesus will be safe. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, Revelation 7:2

John continues here with the scene that was newly presented in verse 7:1 which saw the four angels who were holding back the four winds of the earth. Now, another angel is introduced. As John says, “Then I saw another angel.” This does not have to be

another angel in the sense of a being who has never been seen before, but simply another angel coming into this new scene that began in verse 7:1.

The word "angel," (in Greek, *aggelos*) as has been explained previously, simply means "messenger." It is one who brings tidings. The comparable Hebrew word (*malak*) is used, at times, to speak of the Lord (Yehovah) of the Old Testament, such as in Malachi 3:1 where it is used twice. In that passage, once it refers to the coming of John the Baptist, and once it refers to the coming of Jesus Christ –

> "'Behold, I send My messenger,
> And he will prepare the way before Me.
> And the Lord, whom you seek,
> Will suddenly come to His temple,
> Even the Messenger of the covenant,
> In whom you delight.
> Behold, He is coming,'
> Says the LORD of hosts." Malachi 3:1

This angel is said to be "ascending from the east." Rather than "from the east," the Greek reads, *anatolēs hēliou* – "from *the* rising *of the* sun." Scholars debate who this angel is, but the wording seems sufficient to answer the question. Returning again to Malachi, this time Chapter 4, there it says –

> "But to you who fear My name
> The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
> With healing in His wings;
> And you shall go out
> And grow fat like stall-fed calves." Malachi 4:2

In that verse, the word "arise" is translated from *zarach*, a verb with the same basic meaning as the Greek *anatolé*. This is the same Lord described in Malachi 3:2 as an Angel, and who is now in Malachi 4:2 said to rise as the "Sun of Righteousness." Thus, the implication is "from the east." This then is equated to Christ in Luke 1:78 –

> "Through the tender mercy of our God,
> With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us." Luke 1:78

There, the word "Dayspring" is *anatolé*, the same word translated as "rising" in the analysis above. With this understanding so far, John next says, "having the seal of the

living God." The same word, *sphragis*, translated as "seal," is found also in 2 Timothy 2:19 –

> "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'"

This Messenger carries the seal of the living God. Paul says that the seal by which believers are identified indicates that the Lord, meaning Jesus, "knows those who are His." The corresponding verb, *sphragizó*, is used when referring to the sealing of believers with the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13, and Ephesians 4:30. This sealing comes by faith (believing) in Christ.

The purpose of the seal of the living God here in Revelation will be explained in the coming verses. It is to seal one hundred and forty-four thousand of the tribes of Israel. That is then explained in verse 14:1 –

> "Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads."

John next notes, "And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea." This Messenger is giving instruction to the angels of the four winds, meaning He has control over the elements to withhold or let loose destruction. This is an attribute of the Lord as well. When He spoke, the storm on Galilee abated. At His command, the elements obey – symbolized by the four angels of the four winds.

Thus, this Messenger is another revelation of the Lord Jesus. It is why the book is called the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The many aspects and manifestations of Him are being presented to us so that we can have faith that what was spoken of Him in the Old Testament, and what is spoken of Him in the New, is a reliable witness to who He is.

<u>Life application:</u> In Genesis 3:24, we read, "So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." Later, when the temple was built in Jerusalem, it was oriented east and west. The Most Holy Place was to the extreme west and so worshippers appropriately would face west, away from the rising sun. One reason for this was certainly to prevent idolatry of the rising sun. Instead, the people would look to God for their life.

It was also to allow for the coming promised Messiah, to be the one to rise from the east in order to make entrance into God's paradise possible once again. The east, *qedem* in Hebrew, signifies both the direction and "aforetime," meaning eternity past. Micah 5 tells us that Jesus is the One who would come "from of old," meaning "from the east," using the word *qedem* –

> "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
> *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah,
> *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me
> The One to be Ruler in Israel,
> Whose goings forth *are* from of old,
> From everlasting." Micah 5:2

In Ezekiel 10, the glory of the Lord departed from the temple because of the idolatry of the people. When it did, it left going out over the threshold which is on the east. In Ezekiel 43, when describing a future temple, the glory of the Lord returns from the east.

These, and many other clues, are given in Scripture to reveal the coming of Messiah. In the future, there will be a group of Jewish people who will come to understand this and accept Him as the Messiah they had long rejected.

The coming verses will explain what will be done to and for them. Believers today are marked with the seal of God, which is the Holy Spirit, the moment they put their trust and faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1 tells us that this seal is a deposit or guarantee of our future redemption. As God is sealing us, there is no greater seal possible. It is given as a guarantee, and therefore our salvation is eternal; it can never be lost. The Angel in this verse carries such a seal – an everlasting mark of God's faithfulness. This Angel is JESUS!

What a majestic and splendid display to behold! We can look to the pages of the Bible and see a heavenly drama being played out before our very eyes. It is awesome to our souls to be allowed to peer into these events and see the very workings of the heavenly throne room, if we will just pick up the word and read it. Thank You, O God, for Your wonderful, precious, and superior word! Amen.

saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." Revelation 7:3

These are the words of the "angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God" from the previous verse. Before analyzing them, it should be noted that because

there were four angels and He then came, it means He is now the fifth angel in the scene. EW Bullinger defines the number five, saying –

Five is four *plus* one (4+1). We have had hitherto the three major Offices of the Godhead. Now we have a further revelation of a People called out from mankind, redeemed and saved, to walk with God from earth to heaven. Hence, Redemption follows creation. Inasmuch as in consequence of the fall of man creation came under the curse and was "made subject to vanity," therefore man and creation must be redeemed. Thus we have:
Father
Son
Spirit
Creation
Redemption
These are the five great mysteries, and *five* is therefore the number of GRACE.

Five, being the number of grace, is exactingly seen in this Angel. He is the Redeemer of His people, and it is by faith in Him that one is sealed as a sign and a guarantee of this redemption. He is Jesus, the Giver of God's grace.

He now instructs with a loud voice the four angels who are holding back the four winds of the earth, "saying, 'Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees.'" In this, it is evident that the judgments to be unleashed upon the earth will affect everything, and there will be great destruction as the winds accomplish their tasks. This would include everything that the earth produces and all that is established on the earth. It is a time of grace, regardless as to its actual length. Understanding this order, the voice next says, "till we."

The use of the plural indicates that the process of sealing is not done solely by the Angel crying out. Rather, it is similar in thought to the sealing of those to be saved before the destruction of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 9 –

> [1] Then He called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, "Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each *with* a deadly weapon in his hand." **[2]** And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north,

each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them *was* clothed with linen and had a writer's inkhorn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar.
3 Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who *had* the writer's inkhorn at his side; **4** and the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it."
5 To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. **6** Utterly slay old *and* young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom *is* the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who *were* before the temple. **7** Then He said to them, "Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!" And they went out and killed in the city.

-Ezekiel 9:1-7

As these things are symbolic of truths that occur in the spiritual realm, it may be that the word "we" is referring to Jesus as the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as the Sealer, as is the case noted by Paul several times, such as –

> "In Him you also *trusted,* after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 1:13, 14

A process is set forth with intent. It is looking to "have sealed the servants of our God." These are people who will be sealed because of faith in Christ's accomplished work. They will be brought into the household of God, and in their salvation, they will become witnesses of the truth of God in Christ Jesus.

This designation, servant, is used to speak of those who minister the gospel to others. The word is one that Paul, James, Peter, and Jude each use as a title when referring to themselves. Paul designates several others as such as well. The word is *doulos*, and it signifies someone who belongs to another. He is a bonded slave without any of his own ownership rights. It is used by Paul in this manner, including when referring to Jesus in Philippians 2 –

> "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, **7** but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross."
>
> -Philippians 2:5-8

These to be sealed are thus to be considered bondservants of Christ for the purpose He has determined. With this understood, like the typology from Ezekiel 9, these servants are to be sealed "on their foreheads." Some translations incorrectly say, "in their foreheads." It is a mark upon the head which is clearly visible (in a spiritual sense). They are known for their faith in Christ. Having acknowledged Him, they are marked as His.

The nature of the mark is revealed later in Revelation 14:1 –

> "Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads."

<u>Life application:</u> After the task of marking the people in Ezekiel 9 was accomplished, by the one with the inkhorn, the others were told to destroy anyone without the mark. The mark in that account is the Hebrew word *tav*.

The word is the same as the 22nd letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The ancient *tav* was in the shape of crossed sticks, resembling a cross. In other words, these "servants of God" in this verse in Revelation have accepted the work of Jesus Christ and are being sealed just as those in Ezekiel's time were. This seal isn't necessarily a visible mark, but a change in attitude; an understanding in their minds of who Jesus is and their role in His work.

Such a mark is given with the inner sealing of the Holy Spirit. These people are being saved by God, and for His purposes. Hence, it is defined in Revelation 14 as being that of the Father's name. What God has done in Christ, and through the cross of Christ, is a witness in these servants.

As noted, the term for "servants" signifies a bondservant (or a slave). Such a person was often captured during battle. These to be sealed are won in the great battle for the human soul. It is the spiritual battle between light and darkness. These people of the tribulation period are to be sealed, having been brought into the marvelous light of the glory of Jesus Christ before the angels are unleashed to bring destruction on the earth.

At this time in human history, during the church age, we too must be sealed by the Holy Spirit. That can only happen by placing one's faith in Christ according to the gospel. None deserve what God offers in Christ, but when that grace is received, it is a guarantee of salvation. This is because God is pleased to save them. Through Christ, He has done the work. He is the God/Man. He is JESUS.

Lord God, it is ever so comforting to know that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit from the moment we accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We know that You don't make mistakes and, therefore, we are eternally saved despite our failings. When we stumble and fall, we can still trust that You have already forgiven us of our sins. Great and wonderful You are, O Lord! Amen.

And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: Revelation 7:4

News Flash: When the Bible says "Israel," it is speaking of an ethnic group of people who today are the Jewish people, not anyone else. Israel does not refer to the Jehovah's Witnesses; British Israelism; Black Hebrew Israelites; Israelite Church of God; the Church of God, International; or a litany of other people who falsely claim they are the descendants of the Hebrew people (Israel) found in Scripture, or the "ten lost tribes" (which are not lost at all).

Nor does the church replace the people of Israel to become "spiritual Israel," as claimed by replacement theologians. These are false claims and/or extremely poor analyses of Scripture. They are to be rejected outright.

Concerning the subject verse, the words of this verse are referring to "the servants of God" who are to be sealed on their foreheads, as was noted in the previous verse. Of them, it now says, "And I heard the number of those who were sealed."

A specific number of the "servants of God" are to be sealed, and the number is heard by John. There is a specific number decided upon, just as there are a certain number of Gentiles who will be included in the portion of the redemptive narrative known as the church age. This is explicitly stated by Paul in Romans 11:25 (see commentary on Revelation 6:11).

God is building a house out of His people who are "living stones" (1 Peter 2:4, 6). This is "for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). Such terminology means that God has a plan. He is building something out of the redeemed. As this is so, it would hardly be expected that he would be imprecise in numbers. Rather, with God there is

only perfection. Every aspect of what He is doing is precise and serves an exacting purpose. Concerning these servants of God to be sealed, the same is true. Understanding that, John hears the number. It is “One hundred *and* forty-four thousand.”

The number is precise and obviously serves its own particular purpose. That will be analyzed as the verses continue. However, and getting a bit ahead of the narrative, it will be seen that there are twelve tribes mentioned, and there will be twelve thousand from each tribe that are sealed. It calls out for understanding what the number twelve signifies in Scripture. EW Bullinger states that it –

“...is a perfect number, signifying *perfection of government*, or of *governmental perfection*. It is found as a multiple in all that has to do with *rule*. The sun which "rules" the day, and the moon and stars which "govern" the night, do so by their passage through the *twelve* signs of the Zodiac which completes the great circle of the heavens of 360 (12 x 30) degrees or divisions, and thus govern the year.
Twelve is the *product* of 3 (the perfectly Divine and heavenly number) and 4 (the earthly, the number of what is material and organic).
While *seven* is composed of 3 *added* to 4, *twelve* is 3 *multiplied* by 4, and hence denotes that which can scarcely be explained in words, but which the spiritual perception can at once appreciate, viz., *organization*, the products denoting production and multiplication and increase of all that is contained in the two numbers separately. The 4 is generally prominently seen in the *twelve*.”

In short, twelve is the number of *perfection of government*, or of *governmental perfection*. With this understood, John says, “of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed.”

As noted in the important News Flash above, this is referring to actual descendants of the people of Israel who have been regathered as a people, and who are living in the land of Israel today, with many still living in the nations of the world, but who are identified by their Jewish heritage. As a proof that this is referring to this group of people, and not the church having replaced Israel, one can go to the final Leviticus 26 sermon from the Superior Word which clearly reveals this.

This truth is also discussed throughout the Deuteronomy sermons of the Superior Word. One of note is the sermon on Deuteronomy 8:10-20, entitled “And You Shall Remember the Lord Your God.” Sermons such as these clearly reveal that God is faithful to this unfaithful group of people, and that it is they who are referred to in the book of Revelation.

As an example of the lightbulb properly lit on this issue, even scholars of the past – long before Israel was regathered as a nation – were able to deduce this. For example, speaking of the regathering of the people, Israel, Amos 9:14, 15 says –

> "'I will bring back the captives of My people Israel;
> They shall build the waste cities and inhabit *them;*
> They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them;
> They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.
> **15** I will plant them in their land,
> And no longer shall they be pulled up
> From the land I have given them,'
> Says the LORD your God."

Although most scholars of the past spiritualized or disregarded these words as some type of allegory, several scholars looked to the seemingly impossible, and anticipated a literal fulfillment of them –

"And they shall no more be pulled up - Most certainly this prophecy has never yet been fulfilled. They were pulled out by the Assyrian captivity, and by that of Babylon. Many were planted in again, and again pulled out by the Roman conquest and captivity, and were never since planted in, but are now scattered among all the nations of the earth. I conclude, as the word of God cannot fail, and this has not yet been fulfilled, it therefore follows that it will and must be fulfilled to the fullness of its spirit and intention. And this is established by the conclusion: "Saith the Lord thy God." He is Jehovah, and cannot fail; he is Thy God, and will do it. He can do it, because he is Jehovah; and he will do it, because he is Thy God. Amen." Adam Clarke (1762-1832)

"...and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God; by which it appears that this is a prophecy of things yet to come; since the Jews, upon their return to their own land after the Babylonish captivity, were pulled up again, and rooted out of it by the Romans, and remain so to this day; but, when they shall return again, they will never more be removed from it; and of this they may he assured; because it is the land the Lord has, 'given' them, and it shall not be taken away from them any more; and, because he will now appear to be the "Lord their God", the 'loammi', Hosea 1:9, will he taken off from them; they will be owned to be the Lords people, and he will be known by them to be their covenant God; which will ensure all the above blessings to them, of whatsoever kind; for this is either said to the prophet, "the Lord thy God", or to Israel; and either way it serves to confirm the same thing." John Gill (1697-1771).

First and foremost, to understand sections of the Bible – such as these words in Revelation 7 – there must be an acceptance of God's faithfulness to His covenant promises. If God were unfaithful to the nation of Israel, there would be no security for the believer in Christ. But God has used Israel as a template for eternal security in the individual believer. When the Bible speaks of Israel, it is referring to this group of people, and none other.

Life application: There is a complete structural unity to the number of people being sealed. And, this is occurring during the tribulation period, which is the 70th "week" or 7-year period of Daniel's 70 weeks (see Daniel 9:24-27). This is speaking about the Jewish people and it is centered on Jerusalem, not the church. Only an extremely poor and/or anti-Semitic view of the Bible could come up with a "spiritual Israel" interpretation. Further, only an arrogant but false claim by fringe cults can be made by groups who attempt to co-opt the right to be called something they are not (as noted in those named in the News Flash above).

Rather, those referred to in this verse are the descendants of Abraham, through Isaac, and then through Jacob/Israel. They are Jews who are being sealed for God's purposes as He deals with the world through the Jewish nation once again.

In accepting this truth, we – as believers in Christ through the New Covenant in His blood – can have the absolute confidence that He will deal with us according to the same covenant faithfulness that He has dealt with the disobedient people, Israel. Their unfaithfulness to Him in no way negates His faithfulness to His word. In Christ, we have the absolute surety of eternal salvation because God – who is ever faithful – has done it.

God in Christ has spoken, and He will perform. He is the embodiment of faithfulness and truth. He is JESUS!

Lord God, help us to not be deceived by those who would purposely or carelessly misapply the clear and concise statements of the Bible for selfish, hateful, or other reasons. May You open our eyes to the truth of Your word and lead us in the proper handling of it so that You will be glorified through our studies. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand *were* sealed; Revelation 7:5

The instruction to withhold judgment on the earth until the sealing of God's servants has been called out. The total number of them to be sealed is one hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. That number is now further refined.

The amount of analysis and of speculation on the order of the names is immense. Of particular note concerning the tribes is that Joseph is given instead of his son Ephraim, and that the tribe of Dan is also omitted.

Some other relevant facts are that the sons are not listed according to birth order. For example, Reuben was the firstborn. Judah is the fourth son, and yet he is mentioned first. They were both born to Leah.

Also, the twelve names specifically form six pairs. Placing Judah first seems reasonable because it became the prominent tribe, and it is also the tribe Christ Jesus came through. Reuben being second is paired with him.

The next pairings are Gad and Asher who were both born to the maidservant Zilpah and in that order. Next are Naphtali and Manasseh. Naphtali was born to Bilhah and Manasseh was born to Joseph and his wife in Egypt. Next, Simeon and Levi are mentioned. They were both born to Leah and in that order. They are followed by Issachar and Zebulun, they were the last two born to Leah, and they were born in that order. The last paring is Joseph and Benjamin, the two naturally born of Rachel.

In the list, then, six come through Leah, three come through Rachel (because Manasseh is from Joseph who is from Rachel), two come through Zilpah, and one comes through Bilhah.

As all of the four mothers of the children of Israel are represented, the main idea here is that the list does not neglect any of those four main branches. To come to the number of tribes as twelve varies in lists from the first in Genesis to those in Deuteronomy 33 and to those in Ezekiel. In these varied lists, different inclusions or exclusions are made. There are many speculations on why this is so, and none are without their own difficulties. In the end, a listing of twelve is given to retain the Bible's standard of "perfection of government."

With that as an all-too-brief accounting for the names, John begins the list, saying, "of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand *were* sealed." The modern term "Jew" comes from the name Judah. Judah means "praise." It is therefore the prominent tribe even today. Here we have a lesson which is seen time and again throughout the Bible – "Let the

Praise of God always go first." This is a great spiritual application that we should apply to our own lives and our prayer time as well.

It next says, "of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand *were* sealed." Reuben was the firstborn of Israel, but he lost his right to the birthright because he slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine. Reuben means "See, a Son."

John next says, "of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand *were* sealed." Gad was the firstborn of Zilpah, the handmaid of Leah – Jacob's first wife. Gad means "A Troop" or "Fortune."

These are the blessings for each of these sons of Israel as given by their father before his death –

> "Judah, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise;
> Your hand *shall be* on the neck of your enemies;
> Your father's children shall bow down before you.
> **9** Judah *is* a lion's whelp;
> From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
> He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
> And as a lion, who shall rouse him?
> **10** The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
> Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
> Until Shiloh comes;
> And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.
> **11** Binding his donkey to the vine,
> And his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
> He washed his garments in wine,
> And his clothes in the blood of grapes.
> **12** His eyes *are* darker than wine,
> And his teeth whiter than milk." Genesis 49:8-12

> "Reuben, you are my firstborn,
> My might and the beginning of my strength,
> The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.
> **4** Unstable as water, you shall not excel,
> Because you went up to your father's bed;
> Then you defiled *it*—
> He went up to my couch." Genesis 49:3, 4

"Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him,
But he shall triumph at last." Genesis 49:19

Life application: The sealing of those of Israel is a record of the faithfulness of God to His covenant promises. Israel was (and to this day is) faithfully unfaithful to the Lord, and yet their unfaithfulness in no way negates His faithfulness.

We have in the sealing of these people of Israel a listing that demonstrates that the Lord is not through with this group of people, and they will be used in the future to meet His purposes. Over-analyzing the listing may cause us to miss the most important point, which is that Israel has been preserved, they stand today, and they will stand in the future. This is because the Lord is faithful and true to His word.

As this is true with Israel, it is certainly true with each person who has entered into the New Covenant through the precious shed blood of Christ.

You have ordained all things, O Lord, and You have safely protected what You have ordained, including the children of Israel. Thank You for Your everlasting faithfulness to those who have not always been faithful to You. We can know that because of this, we are equally secure in You. Amen.

of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand *were* sealed; Revelation 7:6

The listing of the servants of God in relation to who their tribe is continues in this verse, beginning with John saying, "of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand *were* sealed."

Asher was the second son born to Leah's handmaid Zilpah. His name means "Happy."

Next, John says, "of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand *were* sealed."

Naphtali was the second son of Rachel's handmaid Bilhah. His name means "My Wrestling."

The verse then finishes with, "of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand *were* sealed."

Manasseh was the firstborn son of Joseph, Rachel's oldest son. His name means "Forgetting."

When Israel moved to Egypt, he took Joseph's two sons for his own, to be counted as a part of his clan. By doing this, they were elevated to the same level as his eleven other sons and this meant that the double portion which came with the birthright was given to Joseph. Although this may be a bit confusing, it was a way for Israel to honor Joseph. The blessings bestowed upon these three by Israel are:

To Asher –

> "Bread from Asher *shall be* rich,
> And he shall yield royal dainties." Genesis 49:20

To Naphtali –

> "Naphtali *is* a deer let loose;
> He uses beautiful words." Genesis 49:21

To Manasseh (and his brother Ephraim) –

> "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
> The God who has fed me all my life long to this day,
> **16** The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil,
> Bless the lads;
> Let my name be named upon them,
> And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;
> And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." Genesis 48:15, 16

<u>Life application:</u> The two sons of Joseph were elevated to the same status among Israel as the sons of Jacob, thus being entitled to the status as tribes of Israel. They had done nothing to merit this, but Jacob decided it would be so. And more, Jacob knowingly guided his hands in order to place his right hand upon the younger brother, Ephraim, elevating him above his brother Manasseh. And yet, it is Manasseh who is named in Revelation as a tribe, and Joseph stands in place of Ephraim.

In each of these actions, the sons received what they were given apart from any merit. Thus, what they received was grace. It is important for us to remember that Christ Jesus died for us while we were sinners. We had done nothing to merit the favor of God in Christ, and yet we – through a simple act of faith – are brought into the family of God and are made sons in His family. In fact, Scripture tells us that we are made "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" in this relationship (Romans 8:17).

Such is the nature of God's wonderful hand of grace. Believe the gospel, trust that it is sufficient to save your soul with an eternal salvation, and then be sure to contemplate the love of God in Christ. He is the Heir of all things and He has offered to share that with His people. Great and glorious is He. He is JESUS!

Lord, it is so wonderful to see how You have worked through real people in human history to unfold Your beautiful plan of redemption. Use each of us also, Lord, in the way that will bring You the most honor and glory. We thank You that we can be a small part of Your loving work in and through the people of the world. Amen.

of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand *were* sealed; Revelation 7:7

The list of the descendants of Israel who are sealed continues in this verse, starting with, "of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand *were* sealed."

Simeon was the second son of Israel's wife, Leah. His name means "Heard."

Next, John says, "of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand *were* sealed."

Levi is the third son of Leah. His name means "Attached."

John next continues with, "of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand *were* sealed."

Issachar means "Wages."

An interesting note concerning this verse is the mentioning of Levi. Under the Law of Moses, the Old Covenant, Levi had no inheritance of land because they were the priests. Because of this, they were given cities within the land areas of the other tribes. But here in Revelation, they are sealed among the other tribes.

This means that one tribe, Dan, is left out of these verses. What this appears to indicate is that Levi is to no longer be singled out as a priestly class. Instead, it is on the same level as the other tribes. And considering the tenets of the New Covenant, this makes complete sense. Here are the blessings of these sons by Israel from Genesis 49 –

> "Simeon and Levi *are* brothers;
> Instruments of cruelty *are in* their dwelling place.
> **6** Let not my soul enter their council;

Let not my honor be united to their assembly;
For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.
7 Cursed *be* their anger, for *it is* fierce;
And their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob
And scatter them in Israel." Genesis 49:5-7

"Issachar is a strong donkey,
Lying down between two burdens;
15 He saw that rest *was* good,
And that the land *was* pleasant;
He bowed his shoulder to bear *a burden,*
And became a band of slaves." Genesis 49:14, 15

Israel noted that Simeon and Levi would be divided in Israel and this is what happened. Levi, as the priestly class, was disbursed among the tribes and Simeon received its land within the borders of Judah. The tribe not sealed in Revelation, Dan, never claimed its intended property inheritance (Joshua 19:40-48) when it was allotted. This may be why they aren't mentioned here, but the variety of speculation on this goes on and on.

Life application: It has been noted that the listing of these twelve tribes in Revelation 7 is complicated, and the speculation on why they are listed as they are is extensive. What should not be in doubt, however, is that these are actual tribes of the people of Israel. They are not allegorical divisions of the church. Nor do they validate nutty cults who make ludicrous claims that they are the fulfillment of these divine promises.

The Lord faithfully promised to preserve Israel, and He has. He has promised that they, as a nation, will enter into the New Covenant. He has even said explicitly when this will happen in Luke 13:35. His unfailing faithfulness to this unfaithful group of people is because He has covenanted with them. In the New Covenant, believers are given the promise of eternal salvation. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee.

If you are struggling with the Lord's faithfulness to you because you have committed some great and terrible sin, all you need to do is come back and look at Israel. They remain a people despite themselves, and you will remain saved despite your own failings. Just be sure to ignore any pastor, preacher, or teacher who says you can lose your salvation. That person does not understand what the word "grace" means. Cling to the unmerited favor you have been granted, and trust in the faithfulness of God in Christ to carry you through to His place of promised rest.

Lord, it is so precious to look into Your word and to contemplate the reasons for the mysteries it holds. Open our eyes and our understanding to ensure that what we conclude is proper and aligned with Your intent. Let us not deviate from sound and reasonable explanations of these hidden treasures. Thank You for Your precious word! Amen.

of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand *were* sealed. Revelation 7:8

The list of the servants of God who are of the children of Israel that are sealed in the future tribulation period is completed with this verse. To finish the list, John begins by saying, "of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand *were* sealed." Zebulun was the youngest son of Leah and his name means "Glorious Dwelling Place."

John next states, "of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand *were* sealed." Joseph is the first son of Jacob's wife, Rachel. He became Pharaoh's right-hand man in leading all of Egypt. His name means "He Will Add."

John finishes the list saying, "of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand *were* sealed." Benjamin is the second son of Rachel, and the last recorded of Jacob's natural sons. His name means "Son of My Right Hand."

Of note is that Joseph's youngest son, Ephraim, isn't mentioned in this sealing of the twelve tribes, but he was given the greater blessing by his grandfather Israel and therefore is certainly represented by Joseph. In other words, where Joseph is mentioned, we can infer that these 12,000 sealed include the tribe of Ephraim. Thus, all of the tribes, with the exception of Dan are mentioned and sealed.

As previously noted, many have tried to insert the church into these verses and claim that what is seen here is the church spiritually representing Israel. Other aberrant cults have claimed that they are the spiritual fulfillment of these sealed Israelites. Such claims are nonsense. Only an extremely poor interpretation, one biased against a literal reading of the Bible, or one that is possibly anti-Semitic, could hold this view.

Here are the blessings given by Israel to these three sons –

> "Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea;
> He *shall become* a haven for ships,
> And his border shall adjoin Sidon." Genesis 49:13

"Joseph *is* a fruitful bough,
A fruitful bough by a well;
His branches run over the wall.
23 The archers have bitterly grieved him,
Shot *at him* and hated him.
24 But his bow remained in strength,
And the arms of his hands were made strong
By the hands of the Mighty *God* of Jacob
(From there *is* the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),
25 By the God of your father who will help you,
And by the Almighty who will bless you
With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.
26 The blessings of your father
Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors,
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.
They shall be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers."

-Genesis 49:22-26

"Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he shall devour the prey,
And at night he shall divide the spoil." Genesis 49:27

Life application: It is obvious that there are literary tools used in the book of Revelation such as allegory, idiomatic expressions, and so on. These need to be interpreted as best as one can from the context of other such uses in Scripture. There are also things that are clearly not merely literary tools, but they are rather to be taken literally. At times, it may be hard to determine every instance of such things. However, there are some things that are presented that are obvious on the surface.

For example, when the Bible speaks of Israel, it is referring to Israel – not the church. What happened to Israel in the past can be used as examples for the church and its dealings with God through Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:11), but this does not mean that Israel suddenly becomes the church.

Keeping the theological categories straight, and not mixing what is in those separate boxes, will keep us from great error. The only way to really be sure of such things is to

read the word constantly, growing in understanding as what has been read is pondered and stored away for future reference.

Such an attitude should be a self-imposed obligation on each person who claims to follow Christ. The only way to know God personally is to know Jesus Christ. The only way to know Jesus Christ is to know the word of God. Read the word, cherish the word, and meditate on the word at all times. In it you will find peace and soundness of mind. In it you will find proper theology. And, in it you will find JESUS.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your faithfulness to the sons of Israel, even in the midst of their unfaithfulness. Likewise, for those who have called to You through Jesus, You keep every promise and You are ever-faithful in Your dealings with your redeemed. We know that, despite ourselves, You will also keep us in Your grasp, and You will bring us to Your everlasting home. Great and faithful are you, O God. Hallelujah and Amen!

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, Revelation 7:9

The servants of God from the children of Israel who were sealed is complete. With that done, John's attention is drawn to a second scene that occurs between the loosing of the sixth and seventh seals. And so, John begins the description, saying, "After these things."

This indicates a progression of time, but this does not necessarily mean from our viewpoint or within the stream of redemptive history. Rather, it can simply be from John's perspective as he watches the scenes appear. What he sees as sequential may be overlapping within the stream of time to us. And this is certainly the case with what he will now describe, saying, "I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number."

Who are these people and at what point in history do they appear? The answer will be given in the verses ahead, saying that they are martyrs of the tribulation period – the final seven years before Christ's return.

Because this is so, and because those who were just sealed in the previous vision were sealed during the tribulation, it shows that the events are only sequential as John views them, but they are overlapping within the stream of redemptive history. They are simply a categorical presentation of things that will occur.

Understanding this, John continues by saying that they are "of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues." Because of this, they are not the same as the 144,000 Jews who were sealed in the first half of the vision. There may be (and indeed surely are) Jews included in the multitude, but the 144,000 are in a different category.

What is certain is that there will be an immense number of people saved out of the tribulation from around the earth, having realized too late for the rapture that Jesus really is who He claimed to be. Now they have proven their faith by being faithful even unto death. This is evident by the words that they are "standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

They are portrayed in the vision as being in heaven. They have left the earthly behind. John next says that they are "clothed with white robes." It is the same symbolism that has been seen several times already. The white robes signify the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Their sins have been covered over, and they stand before God without fault or blemish because of their faith in the Lamb that was slain.

John next says they stand there before the throne "with palm branches in their hands." The palm in Hebrew is *tamar*. This comes from an unused root meaning "to be erect." Thus, the palm is figuratively a symbol of uprightness or righteousness. On Palm Sunday before His crucifixion, John records –

> The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, **13** took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:
> "Hosanna!
> 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!'
> The King of Israel!" John 12:12, 13

The palms signify their faith that Jesus was the upright Savior who had come to save His people, and thus He is the King of Israel. But the symbolism goes further. In Leviticus 23, it says –

> "Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD *for* seven days; on the first day *there shall be* a sabbath-*rest*, and on the eighth day a sabbath-*rest*. **40** And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. **41** You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. *It shall be* a statute forever in your

generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. **42** You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, **43** that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God."

-Leviticus 23:39-43

Palms were to be an integral part of the adornment of the booths constructed by the people of Israel during the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a pilgrim feast, one of the three feasts that anticipate the position of a believer in Christ. Each of the types of branches named carries its own significance, but the palm – as noted above – signifies being upright. This is the righteousness of Christ.

To understand the details of the feast (and indeed all of the Feasts of the Lord) in its entirety, it can be read or viewed at the Superior Word website. These people are now living out the more perfect fulfillment of their pilgrim feast for all eternity in the presence of the One who made that possible. This will be made more evident in the verses ahead.

Life application: Analyses of the events of Chapter 7 that try to align them as sequential, and literally occurring between the sixth and seventh seals in the overall chronology of the redemptive narrative, inevitably lead to a hopeless and confused timeline. The events are categorical, but not necessarily chronological. They are being placed at logical points within the narrative to teach essential truth, regardless as to the timeline in which they occur in actual human history. Holding fast to the dispensational model, without mixing the dispensational categories, will alleviate such problems.

Also, the feasts mentioned in the Old Testament – but which are carefully explained in the books of Moses, and in particular Leviticus – are Feasts of the Lord. They are not "Jewish Feasts," nor are they "Feasts of Israel." They were given to Israel to live out as typological representations of what the Lord Jesus would accomplish.

These feasts, all eight of them, are fulfilled in Christ. There is no future fulfillment of them. This is important to understand. If Christ Jesus did not fulfill these feasts, then He did not fulfill the law. If He did not fulfill the law, He is not the Messiah. To teach that the "fall feasts" are yet to be fulfilled in Israel is – therefore – heresy.

When reading up on these feasts, if they are called anything but the Feasts of the Lord, or if they are said to have a future fulfillment, you can give up on that analysis and move on. This is important to have sound theology. The feasts anticipate Christ Jesus, and they are fulfilled in His first advent.

To finish, the most important point to remember is that all of Scripture is ultimately about God's dealings in redemptive history through His Son. It is this that brings all other things into proper focus. Someday, the redeemed of the Lord will stand before Him for all eternity, praising His glory and reveling in what God has done in and through Him. He is the Lamb of God. He is our King. He is JESUS.

Hallelujah and glory to God in the highest! Salvation has come to men in the Person and work of Jesus Christ our Lord. He has fulfilled the law, paid our sin debt, and prevailed over death – all the work of our Messiah who is our King. Praise You, O God, for the glorious work of Jesus Christ Your Son. Amen.

and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Revelation 7:10

The words of this verse complete the thought of the previous verse. Taken together, they say, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

With this context understood, a better evaluation of the words can be made. John sees the great multitude and now he hears their joyous cry – "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne." As already noted, this is referring to Jesus. Jesus is the One who is "sitting at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1).

The right hand is not a physical position, as if God has parts. Rather, God is Spirit. What this means is that Jesus Christ is sitting in the position of power and authority, represented by the right hand. Thus, He is "our God who sits on the throne." It speaks of the deity of Jesus Christ. Next, John says, "and to the Lamb!"

This now speaks of the humanity of Christ, taking us back to Chapter 5, where Christ is described as the "Lamb as though it had been slain." It refers to the substitutionary death that Christ suffered for His people. It is this act that is highlighted out of His human existence. Yes, He fulfilled the law, but dying was a part of the law. As the law would not be fulfilled without His death, the epitome of the work of Jesus Christ is His crucifixion. This is what the saints here, and indeed all of the saints for all of eternity, will consider above all else when interacting with Christ Jesus.

The terminology in this verse goes back to many occurrences in the Old Testament, but specifically to Psalm 3:8 which says –

> "Salvation *belongs* to the Lord.
> Your blessing *is* upon Your people. Selah"

Salvation is of the Lord, meaning "Yehovah" of the Old Testament. This is yet another example of the deity of Jesus Christ being proclaimed. It is He who sits on the throne as the Creator, and it is He who is the Lamb as our Redeemer. The pattern of Creation/Redemption that is so notably seen in Scripture continues on in this verse. He fills both roles – He is the Beginning and the End of our walk with God. He is the One who calls us and the one who completes the work in us.

In a pun demonstrated throughout the New Testament, the word "salvation" is used in conjunction with Jesus. The name "Jesus" is the Hebrew name *Yeshua* which specifically means "salvation." Therefore, the play on words is saying that Jesus is the One who is God and who is also the Lamb – Salvation *belongs* to our God. He is the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form and the One who reveals the Father to us.

Life application: As a point of doctrine, and as a point to apply to one's life because it pertains to almost all of us, we wonder what will happen to those who do not receive Christ after the rapture. The answer is that the same options are available to them then as are available to them now – salvation or condemnation.

There is a horrifying lie taught in Christianity that if a person has heard the gospel and rejects it prior to the rapture, that person can never be saved. The Bible never even hints at that. As a seeming proof, the words concerning the strong delusion found in 2 Thessalonians 2 is brought forth as some sort of proof text.

This is a very poor interpretation of those verses; it is utter nonsense; it dismisses other parts of Scripture (such as the verses we are now evaluating); it completely overlooks the nature of God; and it diminishes the significance of the cross of Jesus Christ. To understand the meaning of those verses in 2 Thessalonians, you are invited to read the Superior Word commentary on them.

When considering such points of theology, or indeed any other that are the pet peeves of some supposed scholar, teacher, or pastor, the easiest way to determine if it is probably wrong is to simply try to insert that precept into John3:16. For example –

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him before the rapture should not perish but have everlasting life.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him – and is baptized into the Church of Christ – should not perish but have everlasting life.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him – and only reads the King James Version – should not perish but have everlasting life.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him – and proves it by speaking in tongues – should not perish but have everlasting life.

As you can see, the ideas do not sync with what Christ Jesus has said. They are false notions that are unsupported elsewhere in Scripture, and they are the inane ramblings of those who have a perverse agenda that is being pushed.

Have sound theology, don't get caught up in every wind of doctrine that blows across the waters, and don't allow such things to cast you to and fro. Instead, realize that this book – the Holy Bible – is given to reveal God's love for the people of the world as is found in Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation is the Revelation of Jesus Christ because it is revealing Him. To find any other doctrine than that which is laid out in Scripture, or to find any other symbolism than the Person and work of Jesus, is to deny the very foundation of the Christian faith. He is our Lord! He is our God! He is JESUS!

Truly salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb! It is to Jesus that we direct our hope, our love, our devotion, and our praise. Glory to God in the highest for having revealed Himself to us in such a beautiful and loving way! May we as faithful Christians ever praise the beauty of the Lord in the Person of Jesus Christ! Amen.

All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, Revelation 7:11

After noting the great multitude and hearing their cry of praise, John next says that "All the angels stood around the throne." The verb is a pluperfect being used as an imperfect. It more correctly says, "were standing." In other words, the angels were standing around the throne watching the scene of the great multitude just presented. These are the angels referred to in verse 5:11 –

> "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."

Like in verse 5:11, this verse now also includes "the elders and the four living creatures."

The elders are those first referred to in verse 4:4. Of them, it said there –

> "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads."

The four living creatures were then first presented just a couple verses later in Chapter 4–

> "Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. **7** The first living creature *was* like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle. **8** *The* four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within." Revelation 4:6-8

What is seen here is an outer circle comprising the angels. From there, the thrones of the twenty-four elders forms the next grouping, and that is then followed by a circle of the four living creatures. Within that circle, and near the throne, stands this great multitude. And on the throne sits the Lamb.

Of this vast multitude of the heavenly hierarchy which is now accompanied by this great multitude adorned in white, John says that they "fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God." The implication is that this is occurring because of the presence of this great multitude. So vast is the number of redeemed, that the entire heavenly congregation falls down in praise to God for what has been accomplished.

What must be explained is the fact that the great multitude is actually closer to the throne than are the angels. There is a heavenly hierarchy being presented here and the angels, beings who were created sinless and who have never sinned, are outside of the redeemed who were sinners. How can this be?

The answer is found in Ephesians 2:13, which explains what occurs when a person, Jew or Gentile, receives Christ as Savior –

> "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Because of Jesus Christ's work, those who are saved by Him are covered in His perfection, symbolized by the white garments. They are deemed as sinless, and their past sins can never be brought forth again.

Life application: The infinite gap between God and fallen man is restored through the Person of Jesus Christ. The angels come after us because they are, as stated in Hebrews 1:14, "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation." The honors granted to the fallen sons of Adam are immense when Jesus is received as Lord. Sins are washed away and the benefit of being in the very presence of God is restored.

Hallelujah and amen for our great and awesome Lord! He is the One who suffered on Calvary's cross in order to redeem fallen man to Himself. He is splendid. He is arrayed in light and majesty. He is JESUS.

Lord, it's hard for us to grasp the complete significance of what You have done for us. We have sinned and rebelled, and yet You have lovingly granted us restoration to You and release from the debts we owed. How can we do anything but praise You for Your majesty and glory. Thank You for every good and kind blessing You have bestowed upon Your unworthy servants. Amen.

saying:
"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
***Be* to our God forever and ever.**
Amen." Revelation 7:12

Scholarly note: All seven descriptors of this verse are prefixed by the definite article and should be translated that way –

> "saying, 'Amen! the blessing, and the glory, and the wisdom, and the thanksgiving, and the honour, and the power, and the strength, are to our God -- to the ages of the ages! Amen!'" YLT

What we have in this verse are the words of those around the throne as they proclaim words of praise and worship to the One on the throne, "saying: 'Amen!'"

It means something like “verily,” “truly,” or “so let it be!” The heavenly congregation is singing out a doxology of praise, and what they have to proclaim is a surety. Beginning with “Amen” indicates the strongest affirmation that can be made. The honors are great, and they are directed to the Lamb that was slain, but who lives forevermore. Being prefixed by the definite articles implies the completeness and the totality of what each word signifies. They are the highest and most perfect forms of each pronouncement. The words are –

“Blessing.” Rather, it says, “the blessing.” In Greek, it is the word *eulogia*. It signifies adulation, praise, blessing, and so forth. It is a word of commendation. Being prefixed by the article, it is the highest and most concrete form of adulation that can be pronounced.

Next, we read, “and glory.” Rather, it is “and the glory.” The Greek word is *doxa*. Strong’s defines it as “honor, renown; glory, an especially divine quality, the unspoken manifestation of God, splendor.” Being prefixed by the article, it is thus conveying the infinite worth of the One seated before them.

They then call out, “and wisdom.” Rather, it is “and the wisdom.” The Greek word is *sophia*. It signifies skill, insight, intelligence, and the like. One can see the root of both the words sophistication and philosophy. The word itself comes from *sophos*, meaning wise, learned, clever, or skilled. An earlier root is the word *saphēs*, signifying “clear.” The right application of knowledge is worked out in wisdom. One can have knowledge and not be wise. But “the wisdom” belongs to the Giver of knowledge, and everything He does indicates clarity of thought, skill, and application of that which is of the first importance. Solomon calls wisdom “the principal thing” in the proverbs. Being prefixed by the article, the heavenly choir is saying that the embodiment of this “principle thing” sits before them on the throne.

Next, it reads, “Thanksgiving.” Rather, it says, “and the Thanksgiving.” The Greek reads, *eucharistia*. One can see in it the root of “eucharist.” This word signifies gratitude and the giving of thanks. As it is prefixed by the article, it is saying that the very Source of all that is worthy of thanks and gratitude belongs to the Lord God. He is the Source of all things. Therefore, all that is praiseworthy ultimately originated in Him.

From there, they call out, “and honor.” Rather, it is “and the honor.” It is the Greek word *timé*. It signifies a priced value or worth. The question is, “What is the value of the One being praised?” The answer is *hē time*, or “the price.” In other words, He is the One of infinite value. Nothing can price Him, and therefore, He is the Value of values. He is the One beyond possible evaluation of value and so we can only say “the price.”

It next reads, “and power.” Rather, it reads, “and the power.” It is the Greek word *dunamis*. It is a vibrant word signifying “ability to perform.” It can signify deeds, energy, efficacy, and so on. Being prefixed by the article, it signifies that He is the epitome of all such things. There is no lack in His ability to perform, and He is the Source of all energy and power.

They then call out, “and might.” Rather, it reads, “and the might.” The Greek word is *ischus*. It implies force, ability, strength (absolutely). It is therefore the might to overcome resistance. As it is prefixed by the article, it signifies that the Lamb is the One who has absolute ability to overcome that which must be overcome to serve whatever purpose is needed. In His case, He is the definition of that ability, as is evidenced in His overcoming death and the grave.

These magnificent qualities are then said to be “to our God.” As it is the Lamb who is on the throne (verse 7:9), then it is an explicit reference to the deity of Jesus Christ. Only a heretic, and the world is full of heretics, can deny that this is the intent of the words. Jesus Christ is fully God, and He is fully man. And He is so “forever and ever.” The Greek reads, “to the ages of the ages.” It is a superlative way of multiplying the thought, just as in the English “forever and ever.” It will never end, it will continue on unabated, and the qualities are the property of Him in this eternal stream of existence.

The words then finish with the word they began with – “Amen.” So it is, and so it shall be.

<u>Life application:</u> In this great heavenly scene, in verse 7:10, the redeemed (the great white multitude, and certainly inclusive of the twenty-four elders) cried out “Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” Now, and only now, the angels join in the exultation of God. The angels could not join in the previous doxology because angels cannot be redeemed; only humans have that privilege and grace bestowed upon them. But together with the redeemed of the world, the angels can rejoice, just as they have since the beginning. As Jesus said –

> “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Luke 15:10

Because angels can rejoice in the salvation of humans, they join the heavenly cry, which is stated in their highest form, as revealed in the definite articles which precede each honorific. Created beings can give blessing, but this is only based against an ultimate standard of blessing – “the blessing.” We can bestow power (such as on an elected official), but this is being gauged against the ultimate power. Such is the nature of Christ

our God. He embodies the fullest expression of the things we can only partially understand or convey. He is the richest and most complete expression of every good and perfect thing, and to Him alone belongs acknowledgment of this. Let us never fail to return to Him the fullest praise He is due. He is worthy of it. He is JESUS.

Great and awesome and powerful God – You alone are worthy of our highest praise and honor. Forgive us when we fail to give it to You, and help us never to exalt a part of Your creation above You. All things are from You, and therefore, to You alone belongs the deepest stirring of our souls, expressed in worship and praise. Amen.

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" Revelation 7:13

John's eyes have seen and his ears have heard the resounding doxology of praise to God from the great multitude standing before the throne. But John is not understanding the meaning of it all. This is apparent, and so verse 13 begins with, "Then one of the elders answered."

In common usage, the word "answer" signifies to reply to the submission (be it a question, interjection, and so on) of another. However, to answer in the Bible – at times – is a form of speaking that presupposes a question in the mind of another, even if no question has been asked. Thus, there is the taking up of a conversation, answering, without being specifically asked about a matter first. One example of this is found in John 12 –

> **27** "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. **28** Father, glorify Your name."
> Then a voice came from heaven, *saying,* "I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again."
> **29** Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him."
> **30** Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. **31** Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. **32** And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself." **33** This He said, signifying by what death He would die. John 12:27-33

Jesus knew the people were pondering where the voice came from, and without being asked directly about it, He initiated a response to answer the question He knew existed in their minds or between themselves. This is the case now in Revelation. The elder knows John wants to ask what is going on and where all these people came from. In order to preempt him, the elder answers. As John says, "saying to me."

This identifies John specifically as the focus of the narrative. In other words, the heavenly vision has been given specifically for John to record. But he cannot properly record that which he does not fully understand in order to make it meaningful to those who will later read it.

Previously, several options of who these twenty-four elders are were given. One was that they were the twelve Patriarchs from the Old Testament and the twelve Apostles from the New. If this is correct, and it is mere speculation, then which of them has come before John to answer him? The question cannot be definitively answered, but if it were one of the twelve apostles, which would it be, and wouldn't John recognize him? If the elders represent the Patriarchs and Apostles, then there is a 50/50 chance that John already knew the elder. For all we know, it could be a vision of John (of the future) answering his own question that he knew perplexed him when he was given the vision while at Patmos.

That is simply a fanciful speculation, but it is one possibility. Regardless though, the question which is set before him, even though he never asked it, is "Who are these arrayed in white robes." The order of the Greek is different. It literally reads –

> "These, who have been arrayed with the white robes -- who are they, and whence came they?" YLT

The highlight is on the robes. It is understood already from Revelation 3:4, 5 that the white robes signify righteousness, and that from an external source –

> "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy [righteousness]. **5** He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments [externally granted], and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

John does not understand why there is such a highlight on this particular group of saved believers, standing there before the throne. What sets them apart from others who

were saved by the Lamb? John knows that this is the period of time after the church age. This was made evident previously.

There is a time coming on the earth when there will be great judgment, as is testified to by the visions he has already seen. But in the midst of the scenes of these woes, there is also a place for great rejoicing in heaven. In John's inability to understand, the elder states the question in order to offer an answer. He does this by first asking who these people in white robes are. He then asks, "and where did they come from?"

John is looking, he sees these people introduced in the middle of an explanation of the terrors coming upon the world, and he is confused. "The world is being judged for rejecting God's offer of Christ Jesus. The Lamb has sealed Jews during this period, but who are all these people, and where have they come from?" The obvious meaning is "when" are they from. It is as if John's mind is asking, "If the world is in judgment, these must be (?) from some other time. Or am I missing something?"

The answer is next to be provided.

Life application: As noted above, the elder's question implies that John should know the answer. He may have been getting him to think on the matter. John had already heard the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:5 about those who "shall be clothed in white garments."

This is a good lesson for all teachers of the Bible, and even for those who are simply sharing the gospel with others. Just because you know the answer, it doesn't mean you should just give it out. Asking questions of those you are teaching or evangelizing will stimulate them to think for themselves. Likewise, when studying your Bible, you should ask questions of the text and pray for God to illuminate the glorious words of life to you.

Who are these clothed in white? Stand by for the answer. But remember the lesson of righteousness – we overcome the world through properly directed faith in Jesus Christ. When we do, we are covered in His righteousness and will be granted eternal life. What a bargain for those who have been offenders before God, and yet who are now accepted by Him. In His grace, He sent us the remedy. In His love, He sent JESUS!

Yes, Lord God! How wonderfully beautiful it is to stand in Your glorious presence and to know that we are free from the guilt of sin – not because we deserve it, but because of simple faith in the work of Jesus! We stand grateful and humbled by the wondrous workings of You in our lives. All glory, all power, all majesty, all honor – these belong to You alone! Amen.

And I said to him, "Sir, you know."
So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation,
and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.
Revelation 7:14

In the previous verse, an elder is said to have asked John about the great multitude in white standing before the throne. His words were, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" With that in mind, we read John's words, saying, "And I said to him." The verb is present tense and should read, "And I have said to him." We are being drawn into the narrative with the use of the present. With that understood, John continues, "Sir, you know."

The Greek reads *Kyrie mou sy oidas*, "My Lord, you know." It is a respectful way of acknowledging him as an authority or superior. Further, it is a veiled way of saying, "I have no idea." He is implicitly acknowledging that the information is surely known to the elder, but John has not been able to grasp it. This takes us back to a similar dialog from the Old Testament. When Ezekiel was taken to the Valley of Dry Bones, it reads –

> "And He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?'
> So I answered, 'O Lord God, You know.'" Ezekiel 37:3

These questions are not to make the one being asked look uninformed or naïve about a matter. Rather, they are asked to highlight the matter to the reader of the account. It is a way of drawing those who read the words into the narrative in order to focus more precisely on what is being conveyed. Further, it then highlights the superlative nature of what is being presented.

Standing in a valley full of dry bones, one would think, "There is only death and decay evidenced here." But the question, "Can these bones live?" highlights the otherwise impossible nature of the question. The same is true here in Revelation. Asking, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" highlights the source of their position. Just like dry bones coming to life, what would otherwise be impossible is now to be presented and explained to the one viewing the scene. With that understood, we read, "So he said to me."

What John had hoped for was not to be kept from him. The answer to the question that eluded him is provided with the words, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation." The structure of the Greek reads, "These are the (ones) coming out of the tribulation the great."

First, the Greek is a present participle. The people "are coming" and continue to come out. In this, one must remember the lesson from Revelation 1:19 which said, "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this." In short, "the things which are" was explained as the set time known as the church age. After that comes "the things which will take place after this," meaning after the church age. That was then initiated in Revelation 4:1, saying, "After these things." In other words, John is viewing the events of the tribulation period, and there are people "coming out" of it before his eyes. The host standing before the throne is being added to.

Further, in saying, "the tribulation the great," it is a superlative way of saying that there is a time of tribulation which exceeds other times of tribulation. It is those, during that time of great tribulation, that are coming out, and who have "washed their robes."

A clearer reading of the Greek would be, "and they did wash their robes" (YLT). It is an aorist verb. In their coming out, they have washed their robes. It is a completed action; the robes are clean. It is the same symbolism already seen in Revelation. Their robes were unclean, and they have now been purified. The sense is seen in Isaiah 1:18 –

> "'Come now, and let us reason together,'
> Says the LORD,
> 'Though your sins are like scarlet,
> They shall be as white as snow;
> Though they are red like crimson,
> They shall be as wool.'"

The robe is the visible garment, and it thus symbolizes the state of the person. These people were impure, and now they are pure. They were deemed sinful, and now they are deemed sinless. The elder then explains how this happened with the words, "and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

It is important to notice that it is not in their shed blood that they are deemed righteous. It does not say, "they were martyred and have thus earned the right to purification." It is certain that during this great tribulation many will be martyred, and for a host of various reasons. However, only those who have come to God through faith in Christ will stand before the throne, purified and holy. It is the blood of Christ that purifies from sin, and only that. Any other blood is either in a different category, and it cannot purify (see Hebrews 10:4), or it is already tainted with sin if it is in a human being (due to original sin), and it can only increase the impurity before God.

Life application: Some believe the tribulation being mentioned encompasses the entire church age, beginning right in the first century. Various passages and statements from both Jesus and the apostles seem to indicate this. In Acts 14:22, we read this – "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Others believe that the tribulation being mentioned refers only to the second half of the tribulation period. In other words, the tribulation doesn't turn into the "Great Tribulation" until a set point just before the opening of the seventh seal.

Although the first option, the entire church age, is seemingly a possibility, it dismisses the clear timeline set by the Lord in verse 1:19 (noted above) and which is then defined in verse 4:1 (noted above). Further, it dismisses the clear distinction between "tribulation" in general and "the tribulation the great" highlighted here. The structure of the words, and the use of the two definite articles, sets this period apart from all others. Thus, this option is incorrect.

Another option is that it is referring to the second half of the tribulation period. This is not clearly thought out. The reason is that if the church age ends at the rapture, and these redeemed are only from the second half of the tribulation period, then you have all the people between the rapture and this expected "Great Tribulation" period in some sort of limbo that the Bible doesn't mention. It is not a good view.

Rather, what is spoken of in Revelation (such as the four horsemen and the disaster they bring on the earth) encompasses the entire seven-year period foretold in Daniel 9:24-27. And so, verse 14 is a clear indication that this multitude encompasses the entire tribulation period. The events in this heavenly scene (which is going from category to category) are not to be taken chronologically in order to set forth a doctrine of mid-tribulation, pre-wrath, or post-tribulation rapture. Rather, what is being viewed here is an overall panorama of what occurs during the tribulation period.

To attempt to shove these events into a chronological sequence in order to justify a personal opinion on the timing of the rapture is unsound, and it will lead to a convoluted hermeneutic. The sequence of the rapture is defined by Paul in his writings. We are to look for it there, and then apply that doctrine – meaning pre-tribulation – to our theology.

With this understood, many people will face the hard choice of accepting Christ and being martyred, but they will prevail. Because they properly direct their faith, they will have their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. The immense grace of God is demonstrated, even in this time of great tribulation. Faith has been, is, and always will

be the way to be right with God. This is because of the nature of God, what He expects from man – meaning for us to highlight Him and what He has done, and not to exalt ourselves and what we have done – in order to be in a right standing with Him.

And what God has done for the redemption of man comes down to one thing, and one thing alone – the giving of His Son to bring us back to Him. The Bible is, above all else, about JESUS!

Lord Jesus, we know that there is no point in time where Your grace and mercy will fail. Instead, You remain the same yesterday, today, and forever. All You ask is that we have faith in Your work on our behalf and understand that our work is insufficient to bring us back to You. All the credit belongs to You alone. And so, all the praise – for all eternity – belongs to You alone. Praise You, O God, amen.

Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. Revelation 7:15

The ones referred to now are those standing before the throne who have come out of the great tribulation, having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Understanding this, the elder speaking to John continues, saying, "Therefore they are before the throne of God."

Standing before the throne of God, then, is a result of having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. The clear implication is that they would not be standing there otherwise. It is what Peter refers to –

> "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; **18** knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Peter 1:17-19

Paul speaks of the same type of cleansing in Ephesians 5 as well. They were impure due to sin, but they were redeemed unto God by His grace through their faith in the work of Jesus Christ. In this capacity, the elder says they "serve Him day and night in His temple."

Here, the word *latreuó* is used. It signifies to serve God in worship. In the New Testament, it is always used in connection with serving a deity – be it the true God or otherwise (including the creation itself, such as in Acts 7:42 or Romans 1:25).

This was the original purpose of man when he was placed in the Garden of Eden. Translations say man was placed there to "tend and keep" the garden, but that is surely not the intent. He was placed there to worship the Lord and to observe the watch of the Lord, meaning serve Him.

This is now restored to these who have come out of the great tribulation. They will forever be in the presence of God, signified by the term "day and night." It is there in His temple that this is so. The word translated as "temple" is *naos*. It signifies a temple, shrine, or sanctuary. In John 2:19-21, Jesus uses the term when speaking of Himself –

> [19]"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'
> **[20]** Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?'
> **[21]** But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

This temple of God is what Paul refers to in Ephesians 2:21 –

> "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **[20]** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner*stone,* **[21]** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, **[22]** in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

These saints have found their place of rest, and they have found their eternal abode. This is evidenced by the next words, "And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them."

In this, the word *skénoó* is used. It signifies to dwell in a tent or a tabernacle. It is the word used when speaking of Christ's incarnation –

> "And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth."
>
> -John 1:14 (YLT)

Here we have the realization of the Feast of Tabernacles from Leviticus 23 being applied to these people. The feast is fulfilled in Christ (as are all of the Feasts of the Lord), but they are applied to the believer only when the person comes to Christ. For example, Christ is the Passover Lamb of the Feast of Passover, but He is only a person's Passover sacrifice when he comes to Christ. The same is true with the Day of Atonement. Christ is the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement, but He only becomes the atoning sacrifice for a person when His work is applied to him by faith.

There are three "pilgrim" feasts in the Feasts of the Lord where all of the men of Israel were to go to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. These pilgrim feasts were given as typological representations of the believers' inclusion in what the Lord had done. Those feasts are the Feast of Unleavened Bread (fulfilled as is recorded in 1 Corinthians 5), the Feast of Weeks (fulfilled as is recorded in Romans 16 and 1 Corinthians 16), and the Feast of Tabernacles (fulfilled as is recorded in 2 Corinthians 5:7, and elsewhere). These people, standing before the Lord, now participate in what Christ Jesus made available to all through His work.

These people of God are now eternally tabernacling with Christ who is the Tabernacle of God. He is the place where God dwells and reveals Himself, ceaselessly and eternally, to His people.

Life application: This great multitude has regained what was lost in Eden – direct access to God and the joy of worshipping and serving Him. Man was created outside the garden and only placed there afterwards. When he was placed in the garden, it was with the intent of eternally fellowshipping with God. That right was lost when Adam sinned, and man has been toiling the ground ever since.

For those mentioned in these verses of Revelation, that toil has ended. They are in His presence and view Him directly. It is the restoration of what was lost – granted to the fallen and redeemed sons of Adam. This is the hope of the people of God and the joy which each of us should long for with every fiber of our souls.

Jesus Christ came and tabernacled among us. But His glory was veiled during His earthly ministry. When we see Him in His temple, it will be with all of His unveiled glory. He will spread His glory over His people, and they will never again fear or want. This is the great hope of all believers in what God has done through Jesus Christ.

What was lost is regained. What is now wrong will be made right. Exile from God's presence is restored once again. And it is all because of our glorious Lord – our Redeemer and our Savior. It is all because of what God has done through JESUS!

Lord, it is so marvelous to think on what You have done – a plan which spans time itself and which was meant to restore that which was lost so long ago. It is so beautiful to see how You have slowly and methodically revealed Yourself through the pages of the Bible and how those things are coming to a glorious fulfillment. Thank You for the story of Jesus. Amen.

They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; Revelation 7:16

The verse is much more striking in the Greek, bearing several emphatic negatives that increase in intensity as the verse progresses –

> "Not they will hunger anymore, neither will they thirst anymore, nor at all shall fall upon them the sun, nor any scorching heat."

The emphasis is given to show the complete contrast to their having come out of the Great Tribulation. The terrible woes they faced are behind them, because the Lord has redeemed them. As none of these negative things will ever affect them again, then the opposite can be expected (as will be seen in the coming verse).

The words of this verse are based upon words found in the first half of Isaiah 49:10 –

> "They shall neither hunger nor thirst,
> Neither heat nor sun shall strike them."

The seventh chapter of Revelation corresponds to the seventh letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The seventh letter, *zayin*, pictures a mattock, and it signifies "nourish." In this chapter are found the great multitude. Because of Christ, they shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore. They are secure in Christ for all eternity.

With these things in mind, the elder speaking to John says of them, "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore." As noted above, the Greek is much more emphatic, saying, "Not they will hunger anymore, neither will they thirst anymore."

In the coming time of tribulation, there has already been a note of famine, as evidenced from the rider on the black horse with a pair of scales in his hand. The words uttered then were, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius." One's very means of existence will be measured out by weight. And that is only for those who are willing to submit to the authority that controls making purchases (the

mark of the beast of Revelation 13:16, 17). For those unwilling to take the mark, there will only be deprivation and hunger.

Jeremiah, in the book of Lamentations, reveals how terrible death by hunger truly is –

> "*Those* slain by the sword are better off
> Than *those* who die of hunger;
> For these pine away,
> Stricken *for lack* of the fruits of the field." Lamentations 4:9

Along with the hunger is the greatest of terrors when it is faced – thirst. Of all of the agonies that Christ faced on the cross, the only one He called out for relief from was His thirst. Man was created from the dust. Only a continuous intake of water is what keeps us from returning to the dust. Without it, we will die, and the death that is faced is excruciating as the body desiccates. The pangs of hunger are surely outweighed by the terrible pangs of thirst.

Despite having faced these deprivations, those standing before the throne are guaranteed eternal relief from such ever again. Never again shall hunger or thirst pursue them. Instead of selling themselves out for temporary relief, they anticipated the glory that lay ahead of them, having faith that the word of the Lord would provide them relief. Instead of following unrighteousness, ultimately leading to eternal deprivation, they hearkened to the words of Christ in the beatitudes –

> "Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
> For they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6

After proclaiming these things, the elder speaking to John then says, "the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat." Again, as noted above, the Greek is more emphatic – "nor at all shall fall upon them the sun, nor any scorching heat."

The idea of the sun falling upon someone is open exposure to the sun. Those in the tribulation who do not submit to the rule of the authorities will have no home to dwell in. There will only be exposure in the open areas – heat, anguish, and burning. The sun will be so oppressive that it is as if it is literally pressing down upon them, igniting their skin until it burns.

The "scorching heat" is the Greek word *kauma*. It signifies a glaring, burning heat. It is only found elsewhere in Revelation 16:9. Thus, it is another clue that Revelation is not chronological in these events. Rather, they are categorical. These people in Revelation 7

are those who have come out of the great tribulation at any time during its seven-year period. This shows that evaluations anticipating a "pre-wrath," or a "mid-tribulation, " rapture are unsound because they rely on a chronological analysis of that which is not necessarily chronological.

This wind, described here as *kauma*, is known as the *sharav* in Isaiah 49:10. That signifies a burning heat and parched ground where the air carries a quivering glow or glare. The Greek translation of Isaiah 49 uses the term, *kausón* – a burning heat. It used twice in the gospels and also James 1:11 –

> "For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits."

This burning heat – described as *kauma*, *sharav*, and *kausón* – is the burning heat found in the Mideast that arises and scorches everything. The temperatures can rise from a favorable day to a terrifying heat in a very short amount of time, killing anything unprepared for its onslaught. Without adequate protection and sufficient water, anguish and death can be anticipated during such an event.

These people, standing before the throne, have prevailed. They were willing to give up their lives in order to gain eternal life. The promises of never facing such terrors again have been given. The Lord is faithful to those who have demonstrated faith.

<u>Life application:</u> The time of the tribulation will be agonizing even for those who can buy and sell, meaning those who have received the mark of the beast. How much more difficult for those who have chosen Christ over the devil, and who are willing to die rather than take the mark?

For those who fail to call on Jesus before the rapture, there will be a chance to turn to Him during the tribulation, but it will be a terrifying time of deprivation and death. How much better to get right with the Lord now and avoid the terrible choices that must be made during those terrifying days to come! Don't wait until the world quakes with war, famine, disaster, and calamity. Call out to God through Christ now.

His plan was set in motion from the very beginning. But man's fate was also sealed at that time as well. Without accepting what God's plan offers, the ultimate fate will come about – separation from God for all eternity. But through hope in Messiah, God's offer of peace to humanity, we have the assurances of eternal delight and filling in His

presence. This is all because of God's offer of pardon and reconciliation. This is all because of JESUS!

Jesus, You are abundantly merciful to the fallen sons of man. How great is Your love that You will continue to stretch out Your hands to man, even during the time of tribulation that lies ahead! Your promise to those who respond to the call is beautiful – never again shall they hunger or thirst or be destroyed by the heat of the day. Praises to You for Your tender mercies. Amen.

for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
Revelation 7:17

In the previous verse, the first half of Isaiah 49:10 was cited. It being where verse 7:16 was derived from. That continues now in verse 17 which finds its parallel in the second half of Isaiah 49:10 –

> "For He who has mercy on them will lead them,
> Even by the springs of water He will guide them."

Along with this, comes the fulfillment of another blessing first penned in Isaiah 25:8 –

> "He will swallow up death forever,
> And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces."

Understanding the original source of the words and remembering that the context is speaking of the tribulation saints standing before the throne of God, the elder speaking to John continues his words, saying, "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne."

The Lamb, as previously noted, is Christ Jesus in His sacrificial role. It is He who died the necessary substitutionary death for humanity. In His sinless perfection, He could replace Adam as their fallen head, if they simply accept what He has done by faith. These tribulation saints have done so, and they have been redeemed by Him. Further, He has not only redeemed them, but the elder says He "will shepherd them."

This is a paradoxical statement. It is lambs that need a shepherd. In fact, they are almost completely dependent on being shepherded. Without a shepherd, they are helpless to defend themselves from the many challenges that other animals can often face and prevail over. And yet, this Lamb has prevailed over all such challenges, including the

greatest one of all – death. In His victory over death, He is the Lamb that is qualified to shepherd those of His own flock.

So capable is He to do so, that the elder then quotes Isaiah (as noted above), and says, "and lead them to living fountains of waters." The idea of "living waters" is that of running streams and of springs that come up from the earth, and so on. The water is fresh and cold and invigorating instead of stagnant, salty, or muddied. The symbolism is that of ever-flowing life, and thus everlasting life. This is what Jesus spoke of in John 4 –

> "Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give Me a drink," you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.'" John 4:10

It is then added to by the Lord in John 7 –

> "On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. **38** He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' **39** But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given,* because Jesus was not yet glorified." John 7:37-39

It is the Spirit that gives life. These people, because of faith in the work of Jesus Christ, have received the Spirit. In them is found the true fountains of living water which is renewed life, eternal fellowship with God, and eternal joy in the presence of the Lamb. In this state, the elder finishes the verse (and the chapter) with, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

In Isaiah 25, this was attributed to the Lord God, Yehovah Elohim. Jesus is the incarnate Yehovah, and He is the Lord God. It is He who will remove all sorrow and wipe away every tear. Of these words, Albert Barnes says –

"Of all the negative descriptions of heaven, there is no one perhaps that would be better adapted to produce consolation than this. This is a world of weeping - a vale of tears. Philosophers have sought a brief definition of man, and have sought in vain. Would there be any better description of him, as representing the reality of his condition here, than to say that he is one who weeps? Who is there of the human family that has not shed a tear? Who that has not wept over the grave of a friend; over his own losses and cares; over his disappointments; over the treatment he has received from others; over his sins; over the follies, vices, and woes of his fellow-men?"

Man walks through this veil of tears, but God offers us to be delivered to a canopy of joy. It is accessible to any and to all who will simply accept what He has done through the giving of His Son.

Life application: The shepherd symbolism was anticipated by David in the 23rd Psalm, and it was claimed by Jesus in John chapter 10 when He said, "I am the good Shepherd." Likewise, the living waters also are fulfilled in the Person of Jesus as noted above. Because of Jesus, we will go out and find good and safe pasture in a land of plenty.

The green grass will be vibrant from the abundant waters they receive. In that day, we will be comforted by the pure and perfect love of God, and He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. These promises come to us, not because we deserve these things, but because God is gracious and merciful to those who accept the finished work of Jesus Christ, trusting not in their own deeds, but in His work alone. Be sure to not fail the test. The answer to our dilemma, and to being accepted into God's paradise, is to receive what He has done through JESUS!

O God, how great You are! Who could ever imagine the wondrous promises of Your word while living in this fallen world? We have fears, we have hunger and thirst, and we have pains and sorrows. But You have promised that this order of things will someday be replaced with complete and perfect joy! Thank You for the surety we have of that coming day. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Revelation 8:1

With the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand and then the heavenly scene of the great white multitude of Chapter 7 complete, Chapter 8 will go from the heavenly realm back to the earth as the seven trumpet judgments follow from the opening of the seventh seal. But the opening of that seal comes first. And so, John begins with, "When He opened the seventh seal."

This takes the reader back to Chapter 5 where it was noted that the Lamb was found worthy to take the scroll, open its seals, and loose the judgments contained therein. Chapter 6 showed the opening of the first six seals. That was followed with the redirect to the heavenly scene noted above.

Now, with the Lamb's opening of the seventh seal, John says, "there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." The verb translated as "was" signifies "came to pass," or "began to be." It is the opening of the seal that brought it about.
The sequence of events from the previous opening of a seal shows what is probably the intent. As noted, at the end of Chapter 6 came the opening of the sixth seal. Chapter 7 then diverted to the heavenly scene which began with the angels holding back the winds of destruction. This pause of silence is the result of the opening of the seventh seal and appears to correspond to the holding back of the winds. In other words, the pause is reflective of the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand.

The events are not chronological, but categorical. An example of this is that the book of Ruth follows the book of Judges, but its events occur during the time of the Judges. Thus, the main events of Judges are laid out, and then the information of Ruth (that occurred during Judges) is filled in afterwards. Likewise, the event of the sealing is laid out (with its corresponding withholding of the four winds), and then noting the silence in heaven (that corresponds to the withholding of the four winds) is filled in afterwards.

The opening of the seventh seal, then, may actually precede the sealing seen in Chapter 7. The word translated as "about a half an hour" is found only this once in the New Testament. It is a specific division representing a short period of time. One may equate it then to the calm before a storm. Something is coming and everything falls silent in anticipation of it. Because the tribulation period is centered on the people and the land

of Israel (the church has already been raptured), we can see a prophetic parallel from the book of Zechariah –

> "And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem. **13** Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for He is aroused from His holy habitation!" Zechariah 2:12, 13

The sealing of those called out from the tribes of Israel separately from the great multitude in Chapter 7 indicates this. However, they are not all that are saved in the tribulation. That is why the great multitude is also mentioned in that heavenly scene.

This silence precedes the next major set of events, that of the trumpet judgments. Before they are sounded, however, there will be the offering of incense. As seen already, and as will be seen, incense represents prayers. At the opening of the fifth seal, the martyrs cried out for the avenging of their blood. They are obviously saved believers, and they then correspond to those in the great multitude of Chapter 7.

Therefore, the silence now recorded is connected to that. Again, taking these events as purely chronological is not a sound way of viewing what is going on. The Bible is giving a sequence of events, but it is one that spans the tribulation period. Concepts that are explained in short verses and paragraphs are revealing spiritual truths in a categorical manner.

Life application: Most of the earth is coming against the nation of Israel and against the purposes of God. The land of Israel, and specifically Jerusalem, is where Jesus is returning to. When He does, He will establish His kingdom and rule from there. Before this occurs, the world is destined to face great trouble – all for having rejected His offer of peace which is found in Jesus Christ.

During that time, there will be many who will be saved, but most of them will die for their faith in Christ. Very few will enter the millennium without having been martyred. How much better to get right with God now by calling out to Him through His Son. He is the offer of peace that will keep you from the horrors that are prophesied to come. He is JESUS!

Thank You Lord for allowing us to see the great and awesome scene portrayed in the book of Revelation. Surely, it will take place at some point in the future. You have given us the information to know what is coming so that we can choose to make the right decisions now. May many humble their hearts and be receptive to the message before it is too late. Amen.

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Revelation 8:2

This verse introduces the next heavenly vision. It cannot be assumed, nor is it likely, that the vision of the trumpets is a result of the opening of the seventh seal mentioned in verse 8:1. Rather, what occurred after that was described in verse 7:17.

Concerning the sounding of the trumpets which are to be described in the verses ahead, some insights should be considered now. Charles Ellicott notes the following –

"The series of visions which is now introduced extend to the close of the eleventh chapter. There are some features which may be noticed here. There is a marked correspondence of arrangement between these and the visions of the seals. As there, so here, there are introduced two subordinate visions towards the end of the series. The sixth seal was followed by the vision of the one hundred and forty-four thousand and the countless multitude: the sixth trumpet is followed by the vision of the little book and the seven thunders and the measurement of the temple of God (Revelation 10 and Revelation 11:1-14)."

Further, Bengel notes –

"The trumpets of the first, the second, the third, and the fourth angel, are closely connected with one another; and so likewise the trumpets of the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh angel, which alone have *woe, woe, woe*."

Along with these insights, numerous other commentaries have pulled out various insights and have drawn many conclusions concerning what lies ahead. Some incorrectly view these events as a description of the entire church age. Some insert presuppositions and then twist what is said to fit those presuppositions. The wide variety of views makes a sound interpretation difficult. However, two points must be maintained regardless of any other interpretations –

1) The events are surrounding the revelation, or unveiling, of Jesus Christ. He is the central focus of what is being presented, and

2) These main visions are describing events that occur during the tribulation period, even if some visions are general snapshots of events in redemptive history that are provided for clarity for Israel to understand who Jesus is and what has occurred in His first coming.

What is likely, without being overly dogmatic that it is so, is that the trumpets are similar to the seals in that they present what will occur during the tribulation period without regard to a specific chronology. Rather, they reflect categories of destruction that occur as judgment on an unrepentant world progresses through the tribulation.

With these thoughts in mind, the verse now before us begins with, "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God." This immediately introduces a problem because of the use of the definite article before "angels." It seems to highlight them as if they have already been noted somewhere and the reader is expected to thus be familiar with them. Of this, several possibilities are given –

1) They are the angels referred to in the apocryphal book known as Tobit, where it is recorded, "I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One." Tobit 12:15

2) They correspond to "the seven Spirits who are before His throne" of Revelation 1:4.

3) The definite article reflects a state of being where "it would be sufficiently understood, from the common use of language, who would be referred to - as we now might speak of 'the seven members of the cabinet of the United States,' or 'the thirty-one governors of the states of the Union,' though they had not been particularly mentioned" (Albert Barnes).

The first option is incorrect. Nothing in the true canon of Scripture further supports that notion. Further, angels don't "present the prayers of the saints." That is a mediatorial role belonging to Jesus Christ alone. This demonstrates that Tobit is not an inspired book of Scripture.

The second option is quite likely. The Lamb is the one who opened the seven seals, releasing those judgments upon the earth. As the judgments of the trumpets parallel those of the seals, it would make sense that the seven Spirits of God that are possessed by the Lord Jesus (see Revelation 3:1) are His "angels," meaning "messengers," of destruction upon the world that has rejected Him. Zechariah confirms that the Lord is the One to blow the trumpet in judgment –

> "Then the LORD will be seen over them,
> And His arrow will go forth like lightning.

The Lord GOD will blow the trumpet,
And go with whirlwinds from the south." Zechariah 9:14

The third option is a possibility if the second option is found to be incorrect. However, as this is the "revelation" or "unveiling" of Jesus Christ, it is assumed here that these are the seven aspects of the Lord previously described in earlier verses. The Lord Jesus (these seven facets of who He is) is who is being portrayed.

Of these seven angels (messengers), it says, "and to them were given seven trumpets." The word translated as "trumpet" is *salpigx*. It is a war trumpet. In this, it is used to loudly announce the coming vanquishing of His enemies. Elsewhere, such a trumpet was used to call the people of the Lord to war and to inspire them in the battle.

The trumpets are probably not ram horns (*shofar*), but rather are hammered metal trumpets – either of silver or gold. Numbers 10 provides an account concerning the use of hammered metal trumpets –

"And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: **2** 'Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps.'" Numbers 10:1, 2
"When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the LORD your God, and you will be saved from your enemies. **10** Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God:
I *am* the LORD your God." Numbers 10:9, 10

An insight from the Pulpit commentary states, "The use of trumpets on seven days at the destruction of Jericho, the type of all that is worldly, may have suggested the form of the vision here, in the announcement of the judgment and destruction of the world."

The verses ahead will tell of the sounding of these trumpets and of the judgments upon the earth that result from them.

Life application: As you can see, these trumpets were for signaling major events surrounding the people of God, including war. When these seven trumpets begin to blow in Revelation, great and awesome events will follow them on the earth. The cataclysms which come with these trumpets are being shown us in advance so that we can make the right choices now that will save us from the pressures and tribulations

they will usher in. Now truly is the time to call on Jesus and be spared from the difficulties ahead.

Let us consider this then. And then, let us do what is right, calling out for pardon from our offenses and for rescue from the troubles that are prophesied to come upon an unbelieving world. Let us call out to JESUS!

Lord Jesus, in Your word You have graciously given us precious insights into the future so that we can make the right choice now. May those who read Your word understand that it is truth, and may they be willing to call on Your name before the terrible times prophesied there arrive! Thank You for Your word and thank You for the sure promises they contain for those who choose You now. Amen.

Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. Revelation 8:3

The previous verse spoke of "the seven angels who stand before God." One of the options (the preferable one to this commentary) is that they are the same as "the seven Spirits who are before His throne" in Revelation 1:4. The Greek word "angels" simply means "messengers." The coming Christ is called an angel in the Old Testament, demonstrating that the term is acceptable to be applied to Him. As the seven Spirits are seven aspects of the Lord (see Revelation 1:4 commentary), there is nothing doctrinally wrong with this view. Now, in this verse, it says, "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar."

The Greek reads, "over the altar," or "upon the altar." It is the same Greek word, *epi*, or upon, that is used again in this same verse. The altar speaks of the golden altar of incense first described in Exodus 30:1-10 – every single detail of which pointed to Jesus Christ. The incense altar was originally placed outside of the veil in the Holy Place. As it says in Exodus 30:5, it was to be "before the veil that *is* before the ark of the Testimony."

This "angel" or "messenger" is also another unveiling of Christ Jesus, as will be noted as the commentary progresses. Other than on the Day of Atonement, where the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place once a year, nothing except the twice-daily wafting of this incense ever entered the Most Holy Place. The veil stood between the two demonstrating that access to God was restricted until the time set by Him.

However, the altar in heaven is in the very throne room of God, not outside a veil. The tabernacle was made by Moses to be a type, or picture, of the true throne of God. But until Christ died, access to God was restricted. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil was torn in two at that same moment signifying that full and free access to God had been restored through His torn body. He is now that point of access for the redeemed of the Lord.

In heaven, there is no separation between where the incense altar is and where the throne is, because there is no need to separate redeemed man from the presence of God. All who are received into heaven have come through the sacrifice of Jesus. That this angel stands "over" or "upon" the altar is important. As noted above, the altar of the tabernacle prefigured Christ in every detail. No created angel would be allowed to stand "over" or "upon" Christ in this capacity.

It is true that the angels of God are said to be ascending and descending upon (epi) the Son of Man in John 1:51, but that is a different context with a different purpose. Here, the altar is a representation of Christ. The angel (the Lord) stands upon the altar and, as it next says, "He was given much incense."

The incense at the tabernacle was first described in Exodus 30:34-38. Again, every single detail of that incense prefigured the Person of Jesus Christ. The studies on these things should be reviewed to understand all of these magnificent details. There, standing upon the altar, and with the incense, it says that this Messenger "should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints."

Under the Mosaic covenant, it said, "Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it." This was the duty of the high priest (or his designated representative who performed the function in his stead). It was a mediatorial role on behalf of the people. As has been seen in a previous commentary, and as will be stated explicitly in Revelation 8, the incense reflects the medium in which the prayers of the people are transmitted to God.

It says in 1 Timothy 2:5, 6, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus, **6** who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." As the altar, the incense, and the one who offers the incense all were typical of Christ under the Old Covenant, and as there is now one Mediator between God and men, this Angel, or Messenger, is the Lord Jesus. It is another revelation, or unveiling, of His many duties before God.

Of this particular duty, He offers the incense "upon the golden altar which was before the throne." The throne of God in the Mosaic Covenant was represented by the Ark of the Covenant. It is the place where the glory of the Lord was fixed. The way the ark was situated for the poles to carry it reflected a throne. And, again, every detail of the construction of this ark, the things placed inside of it, and so on, all of these minutely pictured the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

In this verse is seen a marvelous demonstration of the mediatorial and intercessory role of Jesus in His humanity then transmitting the prayers of the saints to the throne of God (where He sits in all rule and authority) in His deity. He is the point between the finite and the infinite. He is the incarnate Word of God. He is the Mediator between God and man.

Life application: The prayers in this verse are being offered directly to God with much incense. They are the many prayers of all of God's people in anticipation of the coming of His judgments which then lead into the coming of His kingdom.

God's wrath at sin, and His judgment upon the world, must come first in order to cleanse the world. After this happens, then there can be the establishment of this kingdom. The prayers of the saints are coming now, and they precipitate the great trumpet and bowl judgments upon the earth. God hears and responds to the prayers of His people. Now that they are being brought before Him in great numbers, it means that the time of wrath is at hand.

But those prayers offered to God are only those from the people who have called out to Jesus. God does not, nor indeed can He, hear the prayers of those who are not Redeemed by Jesus. To say otherwise is to say that God does not need Jesus to mediate the prayers of the people. It is no different than saying that there are more paths to God than through Christ Jesus alone. It is heresy.

The makeup of the incense in the Old Testament said, "Whoever makes *any* like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people" (Exodus 30:38). The implication is that only this incense (typical of Jesus as noted above) is acceptable to God. Any other incense (meaning prayer apart from Christ) is abominable to Him.

The typology clearly reveals that believers are never to pray to God with people from other religions, or from false cults. To do so is to acknowledge that their prayers are just as acceptable to God as are those of true believers. Such can never be implied. Be sure to never mix the holy with the profane. There is one Mediator, and God only accepts the

prayers of those who belong to that Mediator. He alone is the access point between God and man. He alone is our High Priest. He alone is JESUS!

Lord God, it is incredible to imagine that the prayers of ages and ages of saints reach even to Your throne. And yet, because of Jesus, our prayers are brought before You. He is our great High Priest who comes to You with them. Yes, our Father in heaven, thank You for Jesus who brings us near to You in prayer. Amen.

And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Revelation 8:4

A literal rendering of the Greek is, "And went up the smoke [of] the incense, the prayers of the saints, out of [the] hand [of] the angel, before the God."

The word "with" is inserted but not necessary. Verse 5:8 says that the incense is the prayer of the saints. There is no reason to deviate from that here. The Douay-Rheims captured the correct sense, saying –

> "And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the hand of the angel."

With this understanding, but still using the NKJV as a reference, taking the previous verse together with this one will provide the context –

> "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. **4** And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." Revelation 8:3, 4

This was immediately after the silence in heaven of verse 1 and the giving out of the seven trumpets to the seven angels who stand before God. In saying "the prayers of the saints," it is most certainly referring to what was said in Chapter 6 –

> "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' **11** Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were,* was completed." Revelation 6:10, 11

There is a cry for the avenging of the blood of these tribulation saints. The white robe indicates they are saints, purified through their faith in Christ. This verse now begins with, “And the smoke of the incense.”

The incense was first described in Exodus 30 as that being used in the tabernacle. As noted, each ingredient pointed to Christ. It was typical of His life as an offering before God. The incense of His perfect life is now completely mingled together as “the prayers of the saints.”

In other words, the two are as one. What happens to the saints is as if it happened to the Lord. This is explicitly revealed in Acts 9 –

> “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. **4** Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’
> **5** And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’
> Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.’” Acts 9:4, 5

Jesus asked, “Why are you persecuting Me?” And yet, Saul had been persecuting the believers in Him. The persecution of Christ Jesus’ people is a direct attack again Him. Likewise, the prayers of Christ to God includes the prayers of His people. This is why the Bible uses the term “in Christ” again and again. There is no separation between the two. In fact, this unity is so strong that Paul says this of believers –

> “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him,* that we may also be glorified together.”
>
> -Romans 8:16, 17

Believers in Christ are so united to the Lord Jesus that they actually become joint heirs with Him as children of God. Understanding this, the result of the prayers for avenging their blood can be nothing less than a sure and decisive response. The outcome is assured as the smoke and prayers “ascended before God from the angel’s hand.”

As noted in the previous verse, the angel (Greek: messenger) is Christ Jesus. He is the Messenger of the Covenant, He is the High Priest, He is found in the censer and in the incense, He is the Avenger of the blood of His people. He is all of these things and so much more. He is the God/Man; the point between the finite and the infinite. This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

The fact that this ascends from the hand (the humanity of Christ) to God (His deity) means that action will be taken. The Lord will respond and avenge, and His judgment will be decisive.

Life application: Our prayers are made acceptable to God, not because they are prayers of any given human beings, but because they are prayers made by believers in the work of Jesus Christ. It is He who makes our prayers acceptable to God. Ephesians gives us this insight when speaking of His fulfillment of the burnt offering sacrifices of the Old Covenant –

> "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." Ephesians 5:2

Jesus' life and work became an "offering and a sacrifice to God." When we call on Him, we receive life and justification because of what He did. Paul then gives an insight into the prayers being offered by the angel in this verse –

> "Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life." 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

We, including our prayers, are "the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." As will be seen in the verses ahead, the prayers to God for His kingdom to come, and the requests for His justice to be served, will be responded to. This is because God in Christ is faithful to His people. He will not turn away from giving them justice. He is our near Kinsman, He is our Avenger of blood, and He is the Lord God Almighty. He is JESUS!

It is so wonderfully beautiful to see how Your word fully supports itself in every way. What came from the hand of the prophets and apostles is that which speaks to the work of Jesus Christ. And it is astonishingly fulfilled in every detail in Him. Thank You for Your wonderful, beautifully crafted, and trustworthy word, O God. Thank You and Amen.

Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw *it* to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.
Revelation 8:5

This verse now continues the thought of the previous verses. The angel having the golden censer stood at the altar and presented incense – the prayers of the saints. Those prayers (the smoke of the incense) ascended before God. With that complete, and with the prayers having gone through the Mediator of those prayers (Christ Jesus), judgment of those on earth in response to those prayers, is God's reply. As it says, "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw *it* to the earth."

Of this, Albert Barnes states the following –

"By the former it had been shown that there would be much prayer offered; by this it is designed to show that, notwithstanding the prayer that would be offered, great and fearful calamities would come upon the earth. This is symbolized by casting the censer upon the earth, as if the prayers were not heard any longer, or as if prayer were now in vain."

The analysis says, "notwithstanding the prayer that would be offered," as if the prayer is ineffective. But that is not the case. The prayers of the previous verses have been heard. They are the prayers of the tribulation saints of Chapter 6 –

> "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' **11** Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were,* was completed." Revelation 6:10:11

It is not that God is ignoring the prayers and that prayer is now in vain. Rather, God has heard the prayers – offered through His Mediator – and there is now a response to those prayers. There is a time where God's wrath will be poured out on nations for the shedding of blood. It is a precept that goes all the way back to the book of Genesis and which is explicitly stated in Joshua.

The sin of bloodshed eventually rises to a level where the Lord will respond. How much more so when it is the blood of His saints, and they are crying out for the avenging of their blood. As it says in Psalm 72 –

> "Precious in the sight of the LORD
> *Is* the death of His saints." Psalm 116:15

The imagery is that the world has spilled its fill of blood and it is now to be judged. Taking fire from the altar and casting it upon the earth is a sign of impending judgment. The symbolism goes back to Ezekiel 10 –

> "Then He spoke to the man clothed with linen, and said, 'Go in among the wheels, under the cherub, fill your hands with coals of fire from among the cherubim, and scatter *them* over the city.' And he went in as I watched." Ezekiel 10:2

In Ezekiel 11, the reason for this is seen –

> "Then the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and said to me, 'Speak! 'Thus says the LORD: 'Thus you have said, O house of Israel; for I know the things that come into your mind. **6** You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain.'"" Ezekiel 11:5, 6

The blood of the slain of Jerusalem called out for vengeance, and it came – symbolized by the taking of coals from the fire. The same is true now in Revelation. The prayers have been heard, and the divine response is issued: Judgment time has come. No incense is added to the coals now, symbolizing no mediation for those who are on the earth that have their hands bloodied with the blood of the saints. They can cry out to God until their throats are sore, but He will not hear. Without the mediation of Christ, their prayers are in vain.

John next says, "And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake." The wording is similar to verse 4:5, but in a different order and with the addition of "earthquake." The idea is that of commotion and the striking of fear and awe into the hearts of those on the earth. It is reflective of what the Lord says of these times (as He describes in detail in Luke 21) and the state of man when they come –

> "men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."
>
> -Luke 21:26

But the accompanying display of noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake are also similar to the great display that occurred when the Law of Moses was received on Mt. Sinai. The judgment on the world is based on this standard, which no one can meet. As Paul says in Romans 3:20 –

> "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin."

The law was given to show us our desperately sinful state and that we needed something more…the righteousness of Christ. The world has rejected this and will now be judged based on the standard set forth in the law and not on Christ's imputed righteousness, of which they lack. Only the saints who trust in Christ alone, and not on some other standard of righteousness, are to be saved. The rest will perish in their unrighteousness.

The word translated as "noises" is the same word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 14:8 to describe the blast of a trumpet. In Zephaniah, the prophet anticipated this coming day of destruction and the blast of the trumpet, warning what would occur at some point in the future –

> "The great day of the LORD *is* near;
> *It is* near and hastens quickly.
> The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter;
> There the mighty men shall cry out.
> **15** That day *is* a day of wrath,
> A day of trouble and distress,
> A day of devastation and desolation,
> A day of darkness and gloominess,
> A day of clouds and thick darkness,
> **16** A day of trumpet and alarm
> Against the fortified cities
> And against the high towers." Zephaniah 1:14-16

Life application: The prayers of the saints were for the avenging of their blood and also a petition for the coming of God's kingdom. Because the Lord hears the prayers of His people, their blood will be avenged, and His kingdom will be ushered in.

God has given His word and allowed the world over two thousand years to learn it and apply its truth – that of salvation through Christ alone. When the Day of Judgment comes, the world won't be able to say they weren't afforded abundant opportunity to accept the gospel and call on Christ.

And so, two truths can be considered to close out this verse. The first is that God has given man a path to being saved, and that path is through Christ Jesus. The second is that God does, in fact, hear that call leading to their salvation. Once saved, the prayers of His people are heard because of the mediation of Christ. We should never feel our prayers are not heard, even if it seems a response is not forthcoming. Being in Christ

means that we are intimately joined to Him. Our prayers are heard, and they are holy because of Christ. God will respond to them according to His wisdom.

Let us trust that this is so and let us never fail to thank our God for having sent His Son to make this possible. He is our faithful High Priest who mediates for us. He is JESUS.

Oh God, when we are given the heavenly insights into Your great throne room, it allows us to understand how You tenderly receive the prayers of Your people and how You do act on them. We know that every prayer of Your saints is precious to You and that in Your wisdom You respond to them at just the right moment in history. Thank You for hearing our prayers. Amen.

So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.
Revelation 8:6

With the opening of the seventh seal being complete, the focus now turns to the sounding of the trumpet judgments. This is based on verse 8:2 that said, "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets." This was followed by the angel with the incense being offered before God and the casting of the censer to earth. With that complete, John now states, "So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets."

As noted before, and without claiming this dogmatically, this is speaking of the seven Spirits before the throne of God. Being called angels does not mean they are created beings. Rather, and as noted, the word translated as angels signifies a messenger. It is a title elsewhere applied to the Lord Jesus, and there is no reason to exclude this representing seven of His roles being played out in a heavenly apocalyptic scene. Just as Christ opened the seven seals, so now, He may be the One to sound the seven trumpets.

And there is no logical contradiction in saying each is the Lord. Jesus is the One on the throne (5:1), He is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5), He is also the Lamb as though it had been slain (5:6), He is also the Angel ascending from the east having the seal of the living God (7:2), and He is also the Angel with the censer (meaning the Mediator) before God (8:3). He is each of these at the same time. As such, we are seeing the work of God in Christ being relayed in individual roles as He works out the unfolding narrative. Again, this is one possibility, and these could simply be seven created angels. The text does not provide enough information to be dogmatic either way.

With this understood, it says these seven angels (messengers) "prepared themselves to sound." The Greek means, "prepared themselves to sound the trumpets." In other words, they have brought the trumpets to their mouths in preparation for sounding.

Life application: The events leading up to this verse have brought the world to the point of the trumpet judgments that will follow. Angels have been used in history as God's ministers of such judgment, including the land of Egypt when they enslaved Israel –

> "He cast on them the fierceness of His anger,
> Wrath, indignation, and trouble,
> By sending angels of destruction *among them.*" Psalm 78:49

These coming trumpet judgments will be directed at the world at it is actively working against Israel, God's covenant people. Similar to the opening of the seals, the first four trumpets will come as a group. This will be followed by two distinct trumpets, and then a last trumpet. The symmetry in these different judgments is remarkable and shows a consistency of how judgment is dealt with by God.

As He doesn't change, this is to be expected. Everything is following a plan known to Him and being worked out by Him. And yet, He grants man free will in the process of these things. His foreknowledge does not negate our free will though. We must willingly come to God through Christ in order to be saved. If you have never done this, today is the day. Don't hesitate. God loves you enough to have sent His own Son to die for your sins. He loves you enough to have sent JESUS.

Lord God, we know that You hear the prayers of Your people and that You are always there to defend them. We can look at past events recorded in the Bible, and we can see how faithful You have been to Your people. And so, we know that You will be the same towards us today. What have we to worry about when You are always attentive to our needs and our protection? Thank You for this. Amen.

The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. Revelation 8:7

John just noted that the seven angels prepared to sound the seven trumpets. With that stated, he now says, "The first angel sounded." The judgments of the trumpets have begun. In this, the eighth chapter of Revelation corresponds to the eighth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The eighth letter, *heth*, pictures a tent wall, and it signifies "wall," "outside," "divide," and "half." It is a rich letter that bears the understood meaning of

terror or dread as well as destroy. The obvious connection to Chapter 8 is that of the initiation of the trumpet judgments and their resulting terror and destruction.

With the sounding of the trumpet, John sees what was prophesied hundreds of years before he was born. It is that which was anticipated by Peter when he spoke to Israel at Pentecost. Next, it says, "And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood." Various Greek manuscripts say more precisely, "mingled in blood."

The result of this first trumpet blast is similar to the seventh plague to come against Egypt before the exodus –

> "And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. **24** So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation." Exodus 9:23, 24

There are differences though. Along with the hail mingled with fire, John notes that it is "mingled with blood." As a point of speculation, this could symbolically be representing the blood of the saints who were mentioned in the previous verses. The censer of incense was filled with fire and cast to the earth. As the incense represents the prayers of the saints, it may be an allegorical way of saying that it is their blood that is being avenged. Next, he says, "and they were thrown to the earth."

This matches the symbolism of the angel casting the censer to the earth in judgment. That judgment has now come. With this thought stated, various manuscripts include after this, "and a third of the earth was burned up."

With this stated, the question is whether this is referring to the entire earth, or the land of Israel, or a portion of the earth where the particular judgment is directed. It is a general word, *ges*, that can signify any of these, and the context is what sets the meaning. And further, it is generally inclusive of the inhabitants of the land.

Here, the context is not sure enough to come to a solid conclusion as to which is being described. However, it most likely appears that these trumpet judgments are directed specifically to the land of Israel. This seems especially so from the contents of Chapter 9. Whichever is correct, it next says, "And a third of the trees were burned up."

This is explicit, but what the words "trees" is referring to can be literal or allegorical. In Judges 9:7-15, there is a parable where trees are equated to rule and authority. This is seen in Daniel 4:14 as well. Jesus speaks of the trees in an allegorical manner as well,

such as in Luke 21:29. Whether literal trees, or whether they are allegorical, it next says, "and all green grass was burned up."

Again, it is a direct statement that appears to be speaking of literal grass. And yet, a question immediately arises as to why "all green grass was burned up," but only a third of the trees were. And so, an allegorical meaning may apply here as well. Humans are equated to grass elsewhere, such as in Psalm 37:2 (and etc.), and a set number of people is referred to at times in Old Testament prophecy also –

> "You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around *it* with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after them. **3** You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your *garment.* **4** Then take some of them again and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel." Ezekiel 5:2-4
>
> "And it shall come to pass in all the land,"
> Says the LORD,
> "*That* two-thirds in it shall be cut off *and* die,
> But *one*-third shall be left in it:
> **9** I will bring the *one*-third through the fire,
> Will refine them as silver is refined,
> And test them as gold is tested.
> They will call on My name,
> And I will answer them.
> I will say, 'This *is* My people';
> And each one will say, 'The LORD *is* my God.'" Zechariah 13:8, 9

With such Old Testament comparisons, it is hard to be dogmatic concerning the nature of what is being described. What is certain is that judgment on a very large scale is being prophesied. After it is accomplished, it will be understood exactly what John is seeing, be it literal or allegorical. However, what seems certain is that this is the time prophesied by Joel and was then mentioned by Peter –

> "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:
> Blood and fire and pillars of smoke." Joel 2:30

Joel prophesied of a time of judgment to come upon the earth (again, it could be the land of Israel only, or the entire earth – the word can mean either) This was then quoted

by Peter. Peter was speaking to the people of Israel at that time. The beginning of the fulfillment of his words came to them at Pentecost. However, Israel eventually rejected Christ Jesus and went into the punishment of exile. Now that they are back in the land, the prophecy of Joel will find its fulfillment. Peter's words to Israel were –

> "I will show wonders in heaven above
> And signs in the earth beneath:
> Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.
> **20** The sun shall be turned into darkness,
> And the moon into blood,
> Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.
> **21** And it shall come to pass
> *That* whoever calls on the name of the LORD
> Shall be saved." Acts 2:19-21

Taking the context (spoken to Israel while under the law), the events of Revelation make all the sense in the world. Verse 7:14 said (in a literal rendering), "These are the (ones) coming out of the tribulation the great." It was an indication that the tribulation saints were coming and continued to come out by faith in Christ. The focus is on Israel during their final seven years under the law, and it is also inclusive of any Gentiles who are willing to accept the gospel and believe in what Christ did on their behalf. That is confirmed by Peter here with the words "whoever calls on the name of the Lord." There is no time that is set. When a person calls on the name of the Lord, he shall be saved.

Life application: If the events described here are literal, and on a global scale (actual trees and grass), just imagine the result on the earth. When the plant life is so quickly destroyed, any rains will then cause mudslides and flooding. Food would become exceedingly scarce and expensive. Disease will begin to run rampant.

One can see how the plagues of the four horsemen can quickly come to pass with just the sounding of this first trumpet. And yet there are six more trumpets to go. The world will begin a cataclysmic tailspin. Things will get progressively worse, not better, as the judgments unfold.

If the events are allegory, the horrors that are coming are no less terrifying. One-third of the leaders and the people they lead will be consumed. But what is seen as a terrifying ordeal is also seen to be a time of grace. Despite the judgment coming upon the earth, for those who call on the name of the Lord, salvation will result. Their physical bodies may die, but their souls shall be saved.

This is the purpose of the judgments. In them, God will judge the world for having taken a perverse path, but these judgments are also intended to wake up the world to return to the sound path offered through Jesus. God could just destroy the entire world in a flash. But He mercifully gives those who survive apocalyptic events the chance to turn to Him. It is reflective of the petition of Habakkuk 3:2 – "In wrath remember mercy." The Lord does remember mercy, even in His wrath. This is sure because He took all of the cup of His wrath and passed it to His Son in order to redeem man. Peace with Him can now be obtained by accepting the work of Christ. Call on the Lord today. Call on JESUS.

Oh God, how sobering it is to see what the results of our sin are. Rather than humbling ourselves and being obedient to You, our Creator, we dismiss You, mock You, and only bring calamity on ourselves. Help those of us who have come to You through Christ to be lights to those around us before the great judgments that Your word says are coming actually begin. May we be responsible with the time set before us. Amen.

Then the second angel sounded: And *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. Revelation 8:8

With the first trumpet sounded and its judgment complete, John next says, "Then the second angel sounded." There is no lull or delay between the sounding of the trumpets. The effects of the first one were directed at the earth. Now the effects of this second one are directed at the sea. As it says, "And *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea."

The wording here needs to be carefully considered. And, like the previous verse, being dogmatic about what is being presented is probably not wise. The first thing to consider is that this is like a great mountain. It is not a mountain. The terminology is apocalyptic, and John is trying to describe something. Using "a great mountain" is his way of doing so.

Secondly, it is "burning with fire." John is seeing something that is huge and filled with the glow of fire. And thirdly, he says it was "thrown into the sea." This can be a literal sea, or it can be figuratively speaking of multitudes of people. What appears to be referred to is a prophecy from Amos 7 –

> "Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, the Lord GOD called for conflict by fire,
> and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory. **5** Then I said:
> 'O Lord GOD, cease, I pray!
> Oh, that Jacob may stand,
> For he *is* small!'

6 *So* the LORD relented concerning this.
'This also shall not be,' said the Lord GOD." Amos 7:4-6

If this is where the symbolism is derived from, John is speaking of a sea of people, probably centered in the land of Israel. If this is correct, then the next words become obvious. John says, "and a third of the sea became blood." It would mean that this burning mountain has made casualties of one-third of the people it was focused at. The idea of the words "became blood" can mean "killed," or it could possibly mean "killed or wounded." Again, it is hard to be dogmatic about something that is future.

The idea of this being a symbolic sea seems to be disproven by the next verse where it speaks of living creatures in the sea and the destruction of ships. However, that is not necessarily so, as will be seen in that verse.

If this figurative option is correct, the question is, "What is John describing?" The answer could be a nuclear detonation. When detonated, it would appear to someone who has never seen such a thing as a great burning mountain – literally glowing with fire. In such a blast, killing one-third of those in the immediate area is not at all unlikely.

Obviously, with such a set of words, John could also be speaking of the literal sea – such as the Mediterranean Sea. If so, the symbolism would not be any different. A nuclear blast going off in the sea would produce much killing, and the metaphor of the sea becoming blood would indicate the resulting death.

If John is referring to Amos 7, it would then be that the first option is more likely. Amos is referring to the people of Israel in his visions, and so it would follow that John – who is heavily relying on Old Testament symbolism – is also speaking in the same graphic manner. As noted in the commentary on the previous verse, it appears that the trumpet judgments are centered on the land of Israel. But again, being dogmatic is not sound with future events that could be described either by literal or figurative terminology.

And further, the "great mountain burning with fire" could be something that is completely different. It is obvious that in the previous trumpet, the censer stood as a metaphor for something else, not a censer itself. The same could be true here. Mountains in Scripture are representative of forms of government, such as Babylon being described as a destroying mountain. And then, there is the "mountain of the Lord," meaning the government of the Lord. Thus, this could be an enraged government, burning against Israel and coming against them.

No matter what, the plague of blood is reminiscent of the first plague of the Exodus when blood struck the Nile –

> "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, 'Say to Aaron, "Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *buckets of* wood and *pitchers of* stone."'" Exodus 7:19

Life application: Evaluating future events is difficult to do, and generations of people have done their best – at whatever time in history they lived – to describe what is being conveyed by John. As time has gone on, people have inserted their current time and circumstances into what they believe is being portrayed.

This is natural because it seems that every generation has thought that they were the generation of Christ's return. People have written as such for eons. In the world we live in today, it is no different. We look around and see the world in the state it is in, we look around at the technology and what it can do, and we make conclusions about the events of Revelation based on those things.

But for two thousand years, people have been incorrect about their belief that they were the generation of the Lord's return. Maybe we are too. And yet, it does appear that the Bible's scenario for future events is rightly aligned with our age. This is especially so because Israel (the nation) is back in the land of Israel. Further, modern technology certainly appears to give us possibilities that were not possible in past generations, such as nuclear war.

For these reasons, we can apply this current knowledge to our eschatology and come up with reasonable analyses of what is being portrayed in Revelation. But let us remember, these things may be literal, or they may be figurative. And so, let us not be haughty or overly dogmatic. We should do our best in our presentations, but we should still remember these events are future and we could be wrong.

In the end, it is our greatest honor to seek out what is conveyed, and to then carefully present our thoughts without bringing discredit upon the exalted name of our Lord in the process. Let us do our best to honor Him in our studies. He is worthy of that. He is JESUS!

Lord, Your word says that great calamities are coming upon the world at some point in the future. They will be more terrifying than anything ever seen before. Isaiah tells us

that man will become rarer than fine gold. This is because they will fail to glorify You. The world will go into a self-destructive tailspin. But for Your redeemed, there will be relief from this. Help us to continue to get the word out to the world before that terrible day comes. To Your glory. Amen.

And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. Revelation 8:9

The words of this verse describe the effects of the "great mountain burning with fire" that was thrown into the sea. As noted in the previous verse, the effects stated in this verse seem to disprove a symbolic meaning of the "sea of people." Instead, it more likely appears to be the literal sea. As it says, "And a third of the living creatures in the sea died."

If this is a literal interpretation, then it would mean exactly as it states. Those living creatures in the sea are affected. But that brings in a question as to what "sea" is being referred to. As the events are focused on the land of Israel, it would mean either the Sea of Galilee (which is more like a lake) or the Mediterranean Sea. It does not have to mean the entire scope of the world, although this is still a possibility.

If the interpretation of the previous verse is speaking in imagery, even these words have a possible symbolic meaning. The living creatures would be those of the tribulation period churches or those who are evangelized by the churches. Jesus used such terminology when comparing the people of Israel to those who are being fished for –

> "And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. **19** Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' **20** They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him." Matthew 4:18-20

Another argument for a symbolic meaning is that John says they are "the creatures that are in the sea" (YLT). He does not say they are "sea creatures," as James does. In James 3:7, he uses the word *enalios*, signifying things of the sea.

Therefore, with neither possible interpretation excluded thus far, John continues by saying, "and a third of the ships were destroyed." Again, this seems to argue against a symbolic interpretation. Ships belong on the sea, and it is ships that are destroyed – as would be described in a literal interpretation. However, both concepts can be brought into a symbolic meaning as well. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown says –

“The symbolical interpreters take the ships here to be churches. For the Greek here for ships is not the common one, but that used in the Gospels of the apostolic vessel in which Christ taught: and the first churches were in the shape of an inverted ship: and the Greek for destroyed is also used of heretical corruptings (1Ti 6:5).”

This is confirmed by the Jesus Walk commentary, a portion of which says –

“The ship (bark or barque, barchetta) was an ancient Christian symbol. [It is] the Church tossed on the sea of disbelief, worldliness, and persecution but finally reaching safe harbor with its cargo of human souls. Part of the imagery comes from the ark saving Noah's family during the Flood (1 Peter 3:20-21). Jesus protecting the Peter's boat and the apostles on the stormy Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41). It was also a great symbol during times when Christians needed to disguise the cross, since the ship's mast forms a cross in many of its depictions.”

Even today in Israel, there is a church of which the pulpit is in the form of a ship. It is on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and it was designed this way to uphold this ancient tradition. And so, a symbolic meaning would be that a third of the churches were affected by the events described here, and are thus destroyed (literally or through corruption of doctrine).

The things analyzed in the previous verse, and in this verse, are given to provide various interpretations of what is coming in the future. The truth of the interpretation will be known after the events occur. For now, we can only look forward with evaluations that may or may not match what will actually take place.

Life application: If the events of this verse are literal, human life will still be lost, even though such is not specifically mentioned here. This is because ships don’t sail themselves. In other words, human life will be lost on those ships and probably many will die from the coastal tsunamis. The tsunamis generated by the Indonesian earthquake killed hundreds of thousands of people all along the Indian Ocean. The disaster of the second trumpet will, then, probably be much, much worse.

Another result of this would be the economic chaos that would result from the loss of all the shipping and the loss of the coastal industries. Finally, the loss of marine life for food would continue to strip the world of food resources.

If the events are to be taken symbolically, it does not diminish the tragedy that will be faced by the people who are affected by them. In the end, the events of the trumpet

judgments will be harmful in the extreme, and when they occur, they will be understood by those who live through them because of what is now presented by John.

But the best part for those who have called on Christ now is that we do not need to be worried about them affecting us personally. We are safe in Christ, and these events will be worked out in a world that has rejected Him. Those who come to Him after the rapture, however, will have to face them head on. Get the word of the gospel out now, while there is time for people to respond. It is our duty to tell of what God has done in Christ for the world. It is our duty to tell of the great things accomplished by JESUS!

O God, if the people of the world would just bow their hearts to You now, things would be so much better. But they refuse to do so. In this, they will come under Your judgment. But in Your wrath, remember mercy, O God. Nobody deserves your grace and Your favor, and without it nothing would be left. But we know the outcome already from Your word, and we do know that mercy will be coming as well. Thank You for this, O God. Amen.

Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. Revelation 8:10

John's attention is now directed to the trumpet sounding of the third angel. With that, he says, "And a great star fell from heaven."

Here, the word translated as "star" is *aster*. It is used for meteors and planets as well as other heavenly bodies. It's also used in a metaphorical sense for people, angels, and even Jesus Himself. Because of this, some commentators have come to the conclusion that this (and the previous object) is actually an angel who has been cast out of heaven and is now in the earthly realm causing havoc.

Others have seen it as a great leader (a prince, ruler, one of high rank, and so on). It could even be a foreshadowing of the lawless one mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:8. It is impossible to deny these views at this point because they are future to us (based on a dispensational view of the events). This star, however, could be something literal that John is trying to describe. If so, this could be speaking of some type of missile with a chemical, radiological, or biological warhead.

Because the word "star" has been (and will be) used both literally and figuratively in Scripture, both literal and figurative views must be considered. This continues to be true with the thought of it falling from heaven. Both real objects will fall from the heavens, such as meteors and missiles, and also spiritual objects, such as the angels being cast

out of their heavenly realm or human leaders that fall away from the truth of God. Any of these may be correct. Whichever John sees, it next says it is “burning like a torch.”

If this is to be considered a literal meteor or a missile, this is exactly what such an object would look like to John. If a missile, the effects of such a warhead would be as one might anticipate, and as will be next described. If this is to be taken figuratively, with the Lord simply providing a physical object to describe a spiritual truth, the result would be the same – death and destruction. It would, however, be spiritually applied.

John next says, “and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.” If taken literally, the same thing must be considered as before. Is this speaking of the entire world, or only the land of Israel where the main focus of attention is? Again, to be dogmatic may be barking up the wrong tree. If on a global scale, the same truth would be applied as if only in Israel. However, it would simply be on a greater scale.

If this is speaking figuratively, Albert Barnes provides one possible explanation, saying, “if it be understood as having a more metaphorical sense, to regard it as affecting those things which resemble rivers and fountains - the sources of influence; the morals, the religion of a people, the institutions of a country, which are often so appropriately compared with running fountains or flowing streams.”

If figurative, then speaking more from a spiritual sense, it may be a corruption of religion as in a great turning away from the gospel that is being foretold during the tribulation period.

Any of these views are, at this point, equally to be considered. The Bible speaks of both literal and figurative fulfilling of such things. It also is applied to spiritual and non-spiritual entities (such as human leaders in religious matters and humans leaders of governments). What is certain is that once the events are complete, they will be understood as the fulfillment of them.

<u>Life application:</u> It is good to consider every aspect of these events, and to not get caught up in too much arguing over points that are both future and that have various possible explanations. In the end, those of the church will be taken out of the world to be with Christ before these events come to pass. Our hope is in Him, not worrying about who the antichrist will be, or whether we will be directly affected by the plagues that are prophesied to occur.

Because of this, let us have our hearts and minds focused on Christ, and let us trust that what is coming will be properly revealed and perfectly fulfilled in their due time. Until then, let us fix our eyes on JESUS!

O God, we look to the events prophesied about the future, and they often seem incredible and yet distant. But these things really are coming to pass, and real people will be affected by them. Help us to get the word out that there is salvation in Christ Jesus. The more we delay, the more people won't hear the good news. The time of the fulfillment of those things is coming. And so, may we stir our hearts to action. Amen.

The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter. Revelation 8:11

The words now being seen are the result of the sounding of the third trumpet. As has been seen, the results of this sounding could be literal, or they could be figurative. This commentary leans heavily in the direction of a figurative interpretation, but still provides a second analysis of what could be an actual set of literal events as well.

These could be literal events that are actually symbolic of other things than those described. As an example, the next trumpet says the sun, moon, and stars will be struck. Though that can be taken as a literal darkening of the heavenly bodies, when such occurs, it is the earth's atmosphere and not actually the sun, moon, or stars that darken.

For now, the verse begins with, "The name of the star is Wormwood." The Greek reads, *apsinthos*. It is a bitter plant and so it signifies that which is intensely bitter. It is that which produces extremely sad results. Of this, Vincent's Word Studies notes –

"Used metaphorically in the Old Testament of the idolatry of Israel (Deuteronomy 29:18); of calamity and sorrow (Jeremiah 9:15; Jeremiah 23:15; Lamentations 3:15, Lamentations 3:19); of false judgment (Amos 5:7)."

What Vincent's is referring to is the Hebrew word *laanah* – hemlock, or wormwood. It is from an unused root signifying to curse. Thus, it is that which is poisonous or accursed. As can be seen from the Old Testament references, they are metaphorical. Therefore, there is no reason to assume that the New Testament references here in Revelation must be taken literally. That is an option, but it does not necessarily follow that it must be so.

With that understood, John next says, "A third of the waters became wormwood." If a literal interpretation is correct, it would mean that the great star that fell from heaven

onto one-third of the rivers and springs of water has poisoned them. This could happen from a nuclear, chemical, or biological attack. The water becomes contaminated and deadly.

If the words are to be taken in a symbolic or figurative sense, this very well could be referring to the false prophet (or the antichrist) who will later be described in Revelation. The analysis of the previous verse again showed that stars can (and often do) speak of human leaders. This then would be a great deceiver who seduces those who have missed the rapture to believe the strong delusion that is coming.

As is obvious, many will not believe him because there is a great multitude in white that have already been seen as coming to a saving faith in Christ. However, one-third of those under this apostatized leader will believe the lie. In their following him (or, if taken literally, the results of the poisoning of the waters), it next says, "and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter."

The water is either literally to be taken as poisonous, or it is to be the exact opposite of what Christ spoke of in John 7 –

> "On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. **38** He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" John 7:37, 38

From Christ come rivers of living water. From such a false and apostatized leader comes poisoned waters of wormwood. In such an interpretation, and one which is highly likely, looking at some of those Old Testament references mentioned above will open the meaning. This wormwood represents contamination by sin.

In Proverbs 5, it is equated with following the advice of an immoral woman. The parallel then is clear – the world has followed the advice of the immoral woman of apostasy and false religion led by this vile leader. This is symbolized by the great harlot coming in Chapter 17. The world will listen to the lies of this false religion and will drink the cup of her bitterness. In Jeremiah 9:15, we also read the effects of wormwood –

> "Behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink."

As you see, the wormwood is connected here with gall that is mentioned in Deuteronomy and Lamentations. Gall is what was offered to Jesus at the cross as well, which He rejected. The rich symbolism shows us the painful effects of sin. The

wormwood of this cataclysm is much stronger than ordinary wormwood that normally doesn't cause death. The wormwood here noted infects the waters, and "many men" will die because of its effects.

Life application: Regardless as to whether the future events are literal or spiritual, the Old Testament clearly shows that the wormwood there is to be taken metaphorically. As this is so, and if these events of the future are also to be taken figuratively, it is evident that even after having the clear evidence of the rapture presented to the people of the world, they will still rather believe the lie they are told than the truth that can save them.

As this is so, and it is clearly true from 2 Thessalonians 2:11, it shows the complete unwillingness of man to accept truth when it is clearly presented to him. This is perfectly evident by following politics. Truth is suppressed in the minds of people because of their dislike of a particular candidate. They will actually believe anything they are told, no matter how ridiculous, rather than believing what is true about the candidate.

The same is true with events in the world around us. Despite all the evidence in the world for the earth being a globe, something that even a junior high school student could prove with a single conference call to friends around the world. People will rather believe the lie of a flat earth, because of their political alliances or allegiances. Blind hatred and constant conspiracy theories can corrupt one's objective thinking.

How much more willingly do people believe the lies from the religion their families and churches have been teaching them for all their lives! The plain and obvious truth of Jesus Christ's deity and humanity are expressly stated in Scripture, and yet cults deny one or more of those tenets as if the words printed in black and white have no meaning.

A pretribulation rapture is clearly taught by Paul, and yet those who have been instructed otherwise deny the literal rendering of the words. Some even deny any such doctrine as a rapture at all. Eternal salvation is highlighted as a principal tenet of proper theology. And yet, this fact is denied, argued against, and belittled by countless people who are unschooled in theology and/or biased against that doctrine.

In other words, each of us must come to the pages of Scripture acknowledging that we may be wrong in what we believe. Then, we should determine to put the truth of Scripture ahead of our presuppositions and preconceived notions. Unless we are willing to do this, we could be as wrong about a particular doctrine as a person is wrong who thinks that he could fall off of the edge of a flat earth into the abyss of space.

Such is the nature of sin (of which bad doctrine is) and of our need to stay away from heresies and false religion, even now. The time is coming when these things will lead to great cataclysms and destruction. Hold fast to the truth of the word. Hold fast to JESUS!

Oh God, the effects of our sin, and our willingness to reject the truth and follow after lies and deceit, will lead us away from You and from what is right, moral, and proper. In the end, these things will only lead to troubled lives, and even to bitterness and death. If we will just be willing to take the moral and spiritual truths found in Your word and rightly apply them to our lives, we will be on the right path in ourselves, in our homes, in our politics, and in our relationship with You. Help us to do this, to Your glory alone. Amen.

Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. Revelation 8:12

The trumpet judgments continue on now with John saying, "Then the fourth angel sounded." As will be seen in the next verse, this is the first of the three triple-woe judgments. For now, however, John continues with, "And a third of the sun was struck."

The previous judgments were directed against the earth (literally or figuratively) in the trees and grass, in the sea, and in the springs of water. This one, at first, appears different as it is directed toward the sun. However, may not be the case. It might be something that occurs on the earth that causes the sun to become obscured. This also includes "a third of the moon, and a third of the stars."

This is similar to the events of the sixth seal as previously recorded in verse 6:12 –

> "I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood."

The first question is whether this is symbolic of something else or is it literal. Either way, obscuring of the heavenly bodies is something that almost universally portends evil. When there are eclipses, the nations tend to see them as bad omens. To have light obscured means darkness. Whether it is literal or figurative, darkness carries the same general thought – that of being oppressed and afflicted.

Another question that remains unanswered is, "Is this only over the land of Israel, or is this global in its effects?" The next verse will use the same general word found

throughout Revelation that speaks of a particular land, the earth, the ground, the soil, and so on. Therefore, the answer remains open to interpretation.

A third of these heavenly bodies being struck would mean that the light of them is diminished by one third. The sun that is normally seen would be darkened by one third. The same is true with the moon and stars. Thus, many dim stars would be completely obscured.

Considering this as a literal occurrence, it could still have figurative meaning. The sense of judgment, oppression, confusion, and so on, from the darkening of the heavens could translate directly to the same thing occurring in the people of the world. In other words, when Christ was born, there was the star in the east that indicated His coming. The real event in the heavens directed the people to the fulfillment of what it was calling out to be seen. Likewise, the literal event in the heavens (here in Revelation 8) could be calling out to direct the people to the fulfillment on earth – human confusion, oppression, and so on.

Therefore, the scope of the event – it being over Israel or over the whole world – would then have less importance than the event itself. The effects of the star being seen above Bethlehem were realized in the coming of Messiah for the whole world.

Although there are differences, this trumpet judgment is not entirely unlike the ninth plague against Egypt. There, the sun was totally obscured for three days. Here, it is only partially obscured. That was shown to be a judgment against Egypt's sun god, Ra. Here, the event is showing that the world and how it operates under the heavens is at the control of the Lord. This is certain because the event is prophesied in advance. Thus, it demonstrates His sovereignty over time and over the physical universe.

Assuming this is a literal obscuring of the heavenly bodies, whether it is global or localized, it is a heavenly sign of God's disapproval of the actions of man and they are being judged for them. That literal sign of judgment is then to be worked out against man in confusion and chaos.

What is certain is that the events of the fifth and sixth trumpets involve real events that will actually happen in and among men dwelling on the earth. This will be seen when we get to those verses.

Life application: During the Gulf War, the oil fields of Kuwait were set on fire. In this, a great parallel is seen between here and the coming trumpet judgments. It may even be

that those events were precursors to what will come again – probably against the land of Israel in particular.

There was so much smoke from those fields that it literally obscured the sun, moon, and stars in a large swath of the earth for an extended period of time. The actual event corresponded to the confusion, war, and mayhem that was occurring on the ground as nations gathered in battle against Saddam Hussein and his forces.

We may have been given an advanced demonstration of how these events will be played out during the tribulation. In fact, some of the events to be described in the coming fifth and sixth trumpets amazingly parallel what happened in Iraq.

For now, let us consider that the book is written, the events are going to come to pass, and they will be known as the fulfillment of prophesy after they occur. We don't need to fret about the cataclysmic things that occur around us as if God is out of control. Rather, prophecy is given to show us that He is in complete control. Let us hold fast to this and not be in fear. Instead, let us direct our hearts to the Lord who is our Peace. Let us direct our hearts to JESUS!

Lord God, how thankful we are to You that, in a world of seeming chaos and confusion, we know that You are in complete control. Events of the future are prophesied to show us that You are in complete control. Whatever happens in the temporary will be overshadowed by the eternal wonder we will experience in Your presence. Thank You that we can live without fear because of the great hope we possess in Jesus Christ. Amen.

And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!" Revelation 8:13

John has just reported what he saw in the sounding of the fourth trumpet and the judgments associated with it. Now, his eyes are redirected, and he says, "And I looked, and I heard an angel."

Manuscripts vary here in saying either, "an angel," or "one eagle." For those who believe it properly reads "angel," their support for it comes from Revelation 14:6 –

> "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people."

The claim for this view is that the words “another angel” mean that what is presented here in verse 8:13 must obviously be speaking of a first angel. It sounds logical at first, but is the term “another” referring to this angel in Revelation 8:13, or another angel in the succession of angels that are presented in the book?

The term “another angel” (or a close variation such as “another mighty angel”) is used nine times in Revelation (7:2, 8:3, 10:1, 14:6, 14:8, 14:15, 14:17, 14:18, & 18:1) when speaking of a general succession of angels without regard to any other particular angel. Further, with “another angel” presented between verse 8:3 and verse 14:6, the defense does not hold up. Whether the term “another angel” or “one eagle” is correct is debatable, but the defense of tying verse 8:3 to verse 14:6 is unsound.

If this is an angel, it signifies a messenger of any sort. If it is an eagle, it is still a messenger, but the symbolism can be derived from other passages of the Old Testament where the *nesher*, or “eagle,” is found –

> “The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, *as swift* as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, **50** a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young. **51** And they shall eat the increase of your livestock and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed; they shall not leave you grain or new wine or oil, *or* the increase of your cattle or the offspring of your flocks, until they have destroyed you.” Deuteronomy 28:49-51
>
> “*Set* the trumpet to your mouth!
> *He shall come* like an eagle against the house of the LORD,
> Because they have transgressed My covenant
> And rebelled against My law.” Hosea 8:1
>
> “Their horses also are swifter than leopards,
> And more fierce than evening wolves.
> Their chargers charge ahead;
> Their cavalry comes from afar;
> They fly as the eagle *that* hastens to eat.” Habakkuk 1:8

The Hebrew word *nesher* comes from an unused root meaning “to lacerate.” Thus, this is an eagle or other large bird of prey. From these and other verses, it is apparent that the eagle represents a quick, decisive creature that strikes at its enemies in vengeance. Such aligns well with what is seen in the coming judgments.

The angel or eagle now being presented is very likely another manifestation of Jesus. This is not without precedent as the Lord of the Old Testament is likened to an eagle several times –

> "As an eagle stirs up its nest,
> Hovers over its young,
> Spreading out its wings, taking them up,
> Carrying them on its wings,
> **12** *So* the LORD alone led him,
> And *there was* no foreign god with him." Deuteronomy 32:11, 12

> "Behold, He shall come up and fly like the eagle,
> And spread His wings over Bozrah;
> The heart of the mighty men of Edom in that day shall be
> Like the heart of a woman in birth pangs." Jeremiah 49:22

These and other verses, and the symbolism of the eagle representing the fourth gospel (the book of John), allow for this to then be another part of the unfolding revelation of Jesus Christ, heralding the events that are to follow upon the earth. And so, whether angel or eagle, it next says it is "flying through the midst of heaven."

Here is introduced a word that is seen just three times in Revelation, *mesouranéma*. It signifies the meridian, or the highest point in the heavens (the zenith) that the sun occupies in the middle of the day. It is not speaking of the space between heaven and earth. This divine messenger (whether angel or eagle) is "saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe.'"

The Greek word is an interjection commonly used by Jesus in the synoptic gospels, *ouai*. It signifies grief, and thus one could also say, "alas." Repeating this three times is a means of providing strong emphasis, and thus doom is being proclaimed because the denunciation is directed "to the inhabitants of the earth."

As is common, the Greek word used for "earth" could be speaking of the land of Israel, the Mideast, or even the entire earth. The sounding of the sixth trumpet specifically mentions the area of the Euphrates, and so the word here certainly extends to those coming from that direction and area, but it does not mean that those troops are not destroyed in the land of Israel during the battle described in those verses.

Because of the sheer number of those mentioned in that trumpet judgment, the "inhabitants of the earth," here, surely speaks of many peoples from many places, if not

the entire planet. With that understood, the call of woe continues with the words, "because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

That is specifically speaking of the three final trumpet judgments. There is much destruction and there will be innumerable deaths associated with them.

Life application: The repetition of a word in the Bible is meant to call stress to that word, such as when we use boldface, italics, or when we put an exclamation point at the end of a sentence or word. Only a very few times in the Bible is a word repeated three times. When these occur, they are not just stressing a point, but they are stressing it to the highest degree.

Some other instances of a triple repetition are in Isaiah 6:3, Jeremiah 7:4, Jeremiah 22:29, Ezekiel 21:27, and Revelation 4:8. The above verse is conveying to the world that what has happened so far with the first four trumpet judgments will be nothing compared to what is coming in the next three. The world is headed for immense trouble from these three trumpet judgments, and it will only continue to get worse because another series of judgments will follow the trumpets. What is coming will be targeted and decisive in nature.

In understanding this, one purpose of the book of Revelation is that it serves as a warning to the people of the world of what lies ahead. One could dismiss its contents if it was a stand-alone book. But the terminology used in it is derived from all of the rest of the Bible, a book which has carefully and exactingly produced numerous fulfilled prophecies already. As this is so, and with this impeccable track record, the contents of the book are to be taken seriously. They are to be accepted as true and reliable prophecies of what is coming upon the world. And that is to be based on the world's rejection of God's offer of His Son. Man is given the choice to accept or reject what God has done. Be wise. Call out today for God's saving offer of JESUS!

O Lord, when Isaiah looked up and saw you in the temple, he cried out Holy, Holy, Holy. Your glory overwhelmed him. However, the world today simply shrugs a shoulder and turns its back on You. How can we be held guiltless when we reject our Creator? Surely You are righteous in bringing judgment upon the world. Give us hearts now to understand our state and turn to You through Your offer of grace and mercy - Jesus. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. Revelation 9:1

Chapter nine begins with the continued sounding of the trumpets. John now says, "Then the fifth angel sounded." The previous verse had called out, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!" That process has now begun. With the sounding, John next says, "And I saw a star."

As was noted in Chapter 6, stars point to leaders in high positions, religious or otherwise. This is certainly the case here as well. With this understanding, John next says, "fallen from heaven to the earth." Some translations incorrectly make the words active – "I saw a star fall from heaven" (KJV). This is not the sense at all. The verb is a perfect participle. The Greek literally reads, "And I saw a star out of the heaven, fallen to the earth." It had already fallen, and that is how John sees it. The words are reminiscent of Isaiah 14:12 –

> "How you are fallen from heaven,
> O Lucifer, son of the morning!
> *How* you are cut down to the ground,
> You who weakened the nations!"

Also, in Luke 10:18, where Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Whether this is Satan, a fallen angel, or a person under Satan's control is debated, but the connection is obvious either way. This is a being that is fallen and whose domain is not connected with heaven. To understand how this could be a human, Daniel 8 must be considered. There, and speaking of humans in relation to stars in this same way, it says –

> "And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down *some* of the host
> and *some* of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. **11** He even
> exalted *himself* as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the
> daily *sacrifices* were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down."
> -Daniel 8:10, 11

With this in mind, John next says, "To him was given the key to the bottomless pit." The Greek rightly reads, "And was given to him the key *of* the pit *of* the abyss."

Special note concerning right thinking: There is an odd group of people, who are actually and inexplicably increasing in number, that believe the earth is flat. One of their main points is that the idea of stars falling to earth is to be taken literally. They claim the proves the stars cannot be billions of miles away.

However, stars don't fall to earth, get handed keys, and then go open pits. This one, however, is referred to in the masculine, him, and is given a key. Thus, like the other such uses in Scripture, verses like this are obviously to be taken metaphorically.

Having noted this, one reason to believe this could be Satan or a demon is that the star is "fallen." This indicates that it is not an angel who held its position in heaven, but, like Adam, fell in a spiritual sense. Another such interpretation can be found in Jude 1:6 –

> "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day…"

As this star was given the key, it means that it doesn't have authority over it except as it is granted to him, meaning at the direction of the Creator. A similar situation where the Lord is shown to have authority even over fallen angels can be found in Job 1 where He directs Satan's movements. This pit is alluded to throughout the Bible, such as in Psalm 55:23 –

> "But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction…"

This place of destruction is where sinners and fallen angels go to be held in custody until the final judgment. However, because God controls all things, it can be opened at His direction. Such is the case here.

<u>Life application:</u> One point of doctrine that is made absolutely certain in Scripture is that the Lord is sovereign over all things. Satan cannot operate without the permission of the Lord, and his minions cannot afflict us without it being allowed. And yet, we open ourselves up to these allowances. The unsaved who do not come to Christ have the devil as their head (see John 8:44 and 1 John 3:8, for example).

Saved believers in Christ have moved to the authority of Jesus, but we can still allow ourselves to be afflicted by demons. This is certain based on the words of Paul found in Ephesians 6 –

> "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places.* **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Ephesians 6:10-13

We remain in a spiritual battle, and we are told to actively participate in both offensive and defensive measures in order to stand against such things. The only way to do this is to take the advice Paul lays out in that chapter, along with applying the many other admonitions of Scripture concerning such things. And the only way to do those things is to read and know your Bible.

This precious word is God's gift to us concerning such things. His intent for man is found there, if we will but listen. And the first thing we must do is to come to Him as He has shown is right. That is through the offering of His Son, our Lord JESUS.

Lord God, we can tell from Scripture that there is a great unseen world around us where the forces of wickedness operate. Thank You for giving us insights into this. By seeing that You control even this unseen world, we need not fear these things, but we can know for certain that You are in complete control of them. Thank you for these insights. Help us to apply the tools You have given us to stand in this great battle. Amen.

And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Revelation 9:2

This verse is in response to the actions of the previous verse where the "star fallen from heaven to earth" was given the key to the bottomless pit. It now says, "And he opened the bottomless pit." As noted in the previous verse, stars in the sky don't get keys and open pits. But this one does, indicating that the words are to be taken in a metaphorical way. The star is speaking of a being that had fallen from heaven and is now given authority to take a specific action – that of opening the pit of the abyss.

Here we see that the ninth chapter of Revelation corresponds to the ninth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The ninth letter, *teth*, pictures a basket, and it signifies "surround," "contain," and "mud." In this chapter is found the bottomless pit that contains the great army of locusts.

If the pit of the abyss is where demons are located, then demonic forces can be expected to be released. One must then decide if these are literally coming to do what is stated in the verses ahead. Or are these things to be seen reflective of other things – such as fallen people who are on the side of the devil. In other words, Nazi Germany had a leader who was certainly demonically influenced. His people, then, could be equated with those who are demonically led. Thus, they would be as if they had come out of the bottomless pit.

The question is, "How literal are the verses to be taken, or how allegorical are they to be taken?" As the events are future, only best guesses can be made. Regardless of that for now, with the opening of the pit, John next says, "and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace." The words are reminiscent of Genesis 19:27, 28 –

> "And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. **28** Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace."

This signified judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah had taken place. Another note with a similar tone is found in Exodus 19:18 –

> "Now Mount Sinai *was* completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly."

The symbolism there, at the giving of the Law of Moses, is that of the Lord's holiness, terror of not meeting it, and both wrath and judgment when failure to meet it occurs. The law was given to show the people of the world their desperate need for God's grace, as is found in Jesus Christ. The world has rejected that, and thus, the analogy here is that of impending doom.

The very word used to describe the furnace in the Old Testament verses gives a clue to what is being pictured. In Hebrew, the word is *kibshan*, a kiln. However, that is derived from the verb *kabash*, meaning to subdue, or to bring into bondage. One can see that the giving of the law actually brought people into bondage – not freedom (something spoken of by Jesus, Peter, and Paul). The people have rejected Christ's freedom, they have remained apart from Him, and the terror and wrath of God will be poured out on them because of this.

Although this is getting ahead of things, something needs to be stated now because the "furnace" terminology is presented at this time. A concept that has been addressed, and that should be addressed again now, concerns what the scope of what is being presented here is. Are the verses speaking of judgment against Israel only, or against the Mideast, or against the whole world?

Daniel 9 clearly indicates that Israel is given seven more years under the Law of Moses. Because only Israel was given the law, it is quite possible that these judgments are coming solely against Israel. Thus, the vast multitudes mentioned in the coming verses are coming against them as God's instruments of judgment (such as was the case with the Assyrians and Babylonians as is specifically mentioned in the Old Testament).

For now, the words of John continue with, "So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit." This can either be symbolic, literal, or both. If symbolic, it is reflective of the judgment on Israel for their wickedness literally permeating the heavens. Or it could be literal as war ensues in the land and the air is filled with the smoke of battle. Or the spiritual could be worked out in the physical – meaning both are the case.

There is already a precedent for the events now recorded, and that will be recorded in the verses ahead. In fact, it is an astonishingly similar pattern – that of the Gulf War. During that war, the oil fields of Kuwait were set on fire, and the entire area was literally shrouded in darkness as the battles ensued. A spiritual darkness also covered the area as the forces engaged in battle. More parallels to this war, which perhaps was given as a precursor to what will happen again in Israel, will be seen in the verses to come.

Life application: As noted, during the first Gulf War, these verses well-resembled what occurred when Saddam Hussein set fire to the oil fields of Kuwait. His actions, although physical in nature and caused by humans, were certainly influenced by evil spiritual forces. Possibly in the future there will be a similar occurrence when armed conflict causes massive and widespread burning that brings about a darkening of the sun and the air.

The tribulation period is given to cleanse the earth of its unrighteousness, but it is more specifically given to accomplish this in Israel. Six points of correction were noted to Daniel concerning Israel's remaining time under the law, culminating in a final seven-year period –

> "Seventy weeks are determined
> For your people and for your holy city,

To finish the transgression,
To make an end of sins,
To make reconciliation for iniquity,
To bring in everlasting righteousness,
To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to anoint the Most Holy." Daniel 9:24

None of these were accomplished in the first four-hundred and eighty-three years. This means those six things are to be accomplished during their final seven-year period. The point of explaining this in the life application section is that Israel, though returned to their land by the Lord, is still not right with the Lord.

They promote self-righteousness, they promote homosexuality, they promote every type of perverse conduct that the rest of the world promotes. And they do it while living under the dispensation of Law. They bear God's name, Israel, and yet they are far from Him. The purpose of God's judgments upon them are corrective in nature. And they will be corrected. Someday they will call out to God through Jesus Christ, and they will be saved as a nation. But two-thirds of them will die in the process.

There are two aspects of dealing with Israel that must be considered then. The first is that we are not to jump on the "support Israel at all costs" bandwagon. As a nation, they are immoral and perverse, and their conduct should be called out. And yet, they are God's chosen people to complete His redemptive purposes for the world through them. Therefore, we are to also support them and pray for them. They need their Messiah. Let us pray for Israel to find their true Messiah. Let us pray for them to find JESUS!

Heavenly Father, You would have Your creatures love You and to love one another, but instead, we revile Your glorious name and we also resolve our conflicts with anger, war, and destruction. We, as believers in Jesus Christ, look forward to the Day when He returns. Someday, these things will no longer occur. We look forward to the Day when righteousness reigns on the earth. Amen.

Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. Revelation 9:3

The events resulting from the sounding of the fifth trumpet continue with these words. The bottomless pit was opened, smoke arose out of it like a furnace, and now John says, "And out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth."

It must be noted that, like the stars representing earthly leaders, locusts in the Bible also represent real people. Due to their number and the way they organize and move in ranks, they symbolize massive armies that work in essentially the same way. First from the proverbs –

> "The locusts have no king,
> Yet they all advance in ranks." Proverbs 30:27

Armies, then, are likened to locusts because of the advance in ranks. However, locusts also fly and devour. That will be seen in the coming verses. For now, not only do locusts represent ranks, but various aspects of warring ranks. From the book of Jeremiah –

> "Set up a banner in the land,
> Blow the trumpet among the nations!
> Prepare the nations against her,
> Call the kingdoms together against her:
> Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz.
> Appoint a general against her;
> Cause the horses to come up like the bristling locusts." Jeremiah 51:27

Locusts are used in simile concerning the riders and the horses of these nations. And again, from the book of Joel –

> "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten,
> The crawling locust,
> The consuming locust,
> And the chewing locust,
> My great army which I sent among you." Joel 2:25

Here, the armies that brought destruction on Israel are equated to the destructive locusts of the land. And, yet again, from the book of Nahum –

> "Draw your water for the siege!
> Fortify your strongholds!
> Go into the clay and tread the mortar!
> Make strong the brick kiln!
> **15** There the fire will devour you,
> The sword will cut you off;
> It will eat you up like a locust.
> Make yourself many—like the locust!

Make yourself many—like the *swarming* locusts!
16 You have multiplied your merchants more than the stars of heaven.
The locust plunders and flies away.
17 Your commanders *are* like *swarming* locusts,
And your generals like great grasshoppers,
Which camp in the hedges on a cold day;
When the sun rises they flee away,
And the place where they *are* is not known." Nahum 3:14-17

The imagery is clear. The warring armies of real humans are equated to locusts. There is no need to depart from the symbolism here in Revelation. These are not some supernatural beasts that suddenly appear in the world, nor are they angels coming to fight in battle.

Rather, what we have presented here are real people employing modern means of combat. What John will describe is from the eyes of a person who had never seen or known of such things, and so he is using apocalyptic terminology to describe it as best as he can. With that in mind, he next says, "And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power."

Scorpions are arachnids that have an exoskeleton (an external covering of the body that provides support and protection) and they have terrible stings in their tails. What John will describe in the coming verses is exactly like this. There is no need to devolve into the fantastic and devise mutant creatures, Nephilim warriors, or space aliens. Rather, what is written about here will be clearly understood with simple examples of modern warfare.

Life application: The plague of locusts is a common theme in the Bible. The 8th plague on Egypt involved locusts, and the book of Joel deals with differing locust plagues in detail –

"What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten;
What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten;
And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten." Joel 1:4

Using Old Testament symbology, John will give the best possible description he can. It will be based on the times he lived in and from the view of the world as he saw it, but not until modern times could we clearly identify what these locusts are.

Even until recently, scholars have symbolically termed them demons or other spiritual beings because what is described are obviously not real locusts.

These locusts are said to have been "given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power." Thus, John is speaking in simile. Scorpions are small and can go anywhere because of their size. They are found on every continent but Antarctica. They can go places that other things can't go and they have the ability to hurt those that they attack. Their exoskeletons protect their insides. These attributes describe what we will see in the verses ahead.

Lord God, it is always so interesting to see what You have placed in Your word. It is often a challenge to our minds to try to understand what is being conveyed to us and how it points to future events. But in carefully studying Your word in its entirety, we can form a much better picture of how things fit into the overall story. And so, help us to be diligent in our studies, cherishing Your word always. Amen.

They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.
Revelation 9:4

This now refers to the locusts mentioned in the previous verse that were given the power "as the scorpions of the earth have power." Of these "locusts," John says, "They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth." The "green grass" was mentioned in verse 8:7. There, it said that "all the green grass was burned up."

Though the two thoughts seem contradictory, they do not have to be. As previously noted, the word "earth" can signify many things, from a certain land – such as Israel – to a portion of the earth, or the entire earth, and so on. Therefore, the destruction of the first trumpet could be localized to an area, and in that area, all the grass is burned up. As noted then, the grass being referred to could also be literal or figurative.

Another point is that the term "locusts" is certainly being used in a figurative sense. This is because of what was cited from the proverbs in the previous verse –

> "The locusts have no king,
> Yet they all advance in ranks." Proverbs 30:27

The locusts here in Revelation are "commanded," implying having a leader. These "locusts" are given orders, and they are on a particular mission. Next, it says, "or any green thing, or any tree." Again, the trees were mentioned in verse 8:7. Mentioning

them again, along with the grass and any other green thing, appears to demand a symbolic interpretation of what these things are.

Green implies life, health, and vigor. Jesus used this idea as He was being led to His crucifixion in Luke 23 –

> "For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed *are* the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' **30** Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' **31** For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"
>
> -Luke 23:29-31

As noted in verse 8:7, the green trees would then speak of people in rule and authority. The green grass would be representative of the people in general, and the other green things may extend to animals of the people from the pet dog to livestock. Such is speculation, and it is hard to be dogmatic about the events. Whatever is alive and healthy appears to be what is referred to in these metaphors. The reason for this is what is then said in the contrasting words that complete the verse, saying "but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads."

Locusts are naturally creatures that eat the green things of the earth. For them not to do so would be contrary to their very nature. With this understanding, these "locusts" are commanded to do what is contrary to the normal function of an actual locust. This needs to be remembered in order to understand what is being presented.

The "seal of God" was referred to in Chapter 7 in relation to the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand of Israel. The sealing was on their foreheads, and so these are those who are being referred to again. Thus, as noted in Chapter 8, it appears that the trumpet judgments are localized to the land of Israel. There are those of Israel who are redeemed by Christ, and then there are those who are not. It is those who are not sealed that are targeted by these locusts.

<u>Life application:</u> Probably, because the sealed are Jewish believers in Christ, these "locusts" are kept from coming against all of Israel – believer or unbeliever – because they would certainly be intermingled and living together in the land. If this is correct, in this time of trial, grace can be found on those who don't yet believe, because they are protected along with those who do. This is a similar concept to 1 Corinthians 7:14, where children with one believing parent and one unbelieving parent are sanctified by the believing parent.

In the end of the tribulation, the nation of Israel as a whole will call on Jesus as Lord, and it is when they do that He will return. Until then, they will go through many trials and troubles as their hard hearts fail to see what is so obvious and clear – that Jesus Christ is their Lord, King, Savior, and Messiah.

Until then, they are as lost as they can be. Like the unsaved that we pray for around the world, remember to pray for the nation of Israel as well – the people and the nation. They are surrounded by many hating nations, and things will only get much worse before they get better. But that better day is coming. When Jesus returns, He will set up His glorious kingdom in their midst.

Heavenly Father, thank You for how You have faithfully kept every promise to Your people Israel and how You, even now, look over them and protect them. Your faithfulness to them is to be a sure reminder that You are also faithful to us, even when we fail You. The covenant in Christ's blood has been made, and You have made sure promises to those who receive it by faith. Thank You for Your faithfulness! You have promised to keep and protect us, and Your word is true. Amen.

And they were not given *authority* to kill them, but to torment them *for* five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. Revelation 9:5

These locusts that came out of the smoke of the abyss were given power like scorpions and were commanded to not harm the grass or any green thing. They are only given permission to harm the people who don't have the seal of God on their forehead. As John says, "And they were not given *authority* to kill them."

What is being described here is not unlike a modern battle using aerial weapons. This will become more evident in the verses ahead. Locusts are flying creatures. Scorpions are creatures that have a hard exoskeleton. And more, scorpions have stingers to harm their enemies.

Unlike real locusts, these have an authority over them. That authority has determined to torment, but not to kill. This is exactingly what happened during the Vietnam war at times, also in the Gulf War, and in many battles since. It is also what happens in Israel constantly. The air forces of these nations are given authority to attack the enemy from the air, but they are actually not given permission to kill anyone. Hence, for example, they will give a warning that a building is going to be destroyed. Once the occupants clear out, down it goes.

An example of this is recorded on Wikipedia, saying –

“As early as 2006 the IDF had the practice of warning the inhabitants of a building that was about to be attacked. Roof knocking was used during the 2008–2009 Gaza War, Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012, and Operation Protective Edge in 2014. In the six months prior to its use, Israel collected data on Hamas members, which they used to issue warnings. Typically, Israeli intelligence officers and Shin Bet security servicemen contacted residents of a building in which they suspected storage of military assets and told them that they had 10–15 minutes to flee the attack, although in some cases the delay has been as little as five minutes.’

This was common practice in the Gulf War as well. Coalition forces would give demonstrations of their capabilities to the enemy battle lines. This would be followed with a warning to surrender or be destroyed in the same manner. Again, from Wikipedia–

“Eleven BLU-82Bs were palletized and dropped in five night missions during the 1991 Gulf War, all from Special Operations MC-130 Combat Talons. ... Later, bombs were dropped as much for their psychological effect as for their anti-personnel effects. Due to the size of the conventional blast, a British SAS unit that witnessed the explosion mistakenly assumed the U.S. had used a nuclear weapon and radioed back to their headquarters exclaiming, ‘Sir, the blokes have just nuked Kuwait!’”

In one such drop, intended for psychological effect, an entire battle line surrendered rather than face such a terrifying weapon. This type of warfare is then a perfect example of John’s next words. The locusts were given authority not to kill, “but to torment them *for* five months.”

The Gulf War lasted forty-two days. During much of that time, surgical strikes were made that were intended to harm but not to kill. Operations in the Gaza war lasted various time lengths, and the intent by Israel was to wage war with as little loss of enemy life as possible. What John is seeing in Revelation is certainly such a battle. This is then evidenced by the next words. He notes that “Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man.”

John is describing what he calls locusts. These have power as the scorpions of the earth have (certainly offensive, but not excluding defensive – meaning its exoskeleton), and they are given authority to torment, but not to kill. The offensive torment of a scorpion is a sharp and painful sting.

A person two thousand years ago who is watching a modern battle would see jet fighters shooting their missiles at the enemy (who has already been given warning to

evacuate a building) and think he was watching some sort of creature shooting its sting. John, not understanding what he was seeing in a modern sense, is accurately describing exactly such a modern scenario with imagery that was known to him. This will continue to be exactingly described by him in the verses ahead.

Life application: What is happening here is similar to the account in Ezekiel Chapter 9 where judgment came on the Israelites for rejecting God and turning after idolatry.

In that passage, those without the seal of God are killed. However, these unbelievers during the Tribulation are only tormented for five months but are not killed. There is a mixture of grace and punishment in this. The mercy is that their lives are spared, but the punishment is that they have to endure the torment as if being struck by a scorpion when it strikes a man. In other words, there is great affliction, pain, and suffering involved in a scorpion sting and these people will endure through that. Lamentations 4:9 tells us that sometimes death is preferable to life in such dire situations –

> "*Those* slain by the sword are better off
> Than *those* who die of hunger;
> For these pine away,
> Stricken *for lack* of the fruits of the field."

In the end, such trials and troubles are brought upon us. We can't point our finger at God and blame Him when He has revealed Himself to us in the Person of Jesus, as testified through His word. Even more so, we have to accept the fact that the world has been told, in advance, of what is coming and how to avoid it. Surely God is just.

But in His love for His people, He sent an offer of peace in the giving of His Son. Through Him is pardon from sin and reconciliation to God through adoption. All God asks man to do is to believe. Accept the gospel today. Call on JESUS.

Lord, our eyes look to You for all good things, and surely all the necessities of life are graciously given to us. But when we receive them, we look at them as the work of our own hands, forgetting that they came from You. Eventually, we push You out of our lives completely and reap the harvest of such unrighteousness. Surely You are justified when You judge us in our faithlessness. But Lord, soften our hearts and remind us that You are the Source of all goodness and blessing. May we always return gratitude to You for such things. Amen.

In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. Revelation 9:6

The translation here is lacking several definite articles –

> "In those days, the men will seek the death and will not find it. They will desire to die. And the death flees from them."

In this, it graphically personifies death, and it shows the miserable state of existence of these particular men. They are looking for Death, anticipating him. And yet, this same Death will be escaping out of their reach, fleeing from them though they long to embrace him.

With those changes noted, the words can be more precisely analyzed. John begins with, "In those days." This is referring to the time of the locusts tormenting the men they target like the torment of a scorpion. It is a period of five months. From there, John says, "[the] men will seek [the] death."

The death brought on by the locusts is what is anticipated. So constant, so maddening, and so terrifying is their sting that with each new attack, these targeted men will hope that the barrage will find them and destroy them. For five months, there will be no time of expected safety or calm.

Like a person enduring Chinese water torture, the attacks will come at any time without warning. Morning, noon, or throughout the night. Sleep will be impossible, mealtime will be a time of fear, and so on. The state of death will be preferred over continued existence. And yet, John says of their seeking death, that they "will not find it."

Like soldiers stuck in a foxhole enduring a constant barrage of artillery, and who finally come to the point where they desire the next shell to end their existence, so will these people hope that the next air assault will be their end. The strain on the human physique, and the torture to the mind, will come to such an exhausted state that death will be preferable to life. Of this, John next says that "they will desire to die, and death will flee from them."

The repetition here is a poetic tool known as parallelism. It is found throughout the Bible. A thought is stated and then it is restated in a similar manner. It is a means of intensifying the text to accentuate the emotion. It emphasizes what is being said and it draws the reader's attention to the situation –

* men will seek death and will not find it
* they will desire to die, and death will flee from them

The obvious question is, “If they are seeking death and yet not finding it, then why don’t they kill themselves.” This is the paradox of human existence. Though we may long for something, we will often not actively pursue it.

Even when a person is faced with the hope of death, there is still such a strong will to survive that the thought of suicide is entirely excluded. Were it not so, the battlefields of history would be riddled with self-inflicted wounds. And yet, they are an almost insignificant number in comparison to the overall total.

And of those deaths that are self-inflicted during war, the majority of those are for reasons beyond the simple desire to end one’s existence. Soldiers will sacrifice themselves for the sake of others. Or they may fall on their own sword to avoid worse treatment while still alive (see 1 Samuel 31:4).

In this, one can see the absolutely horrifying nature of the attack by the locusts. Men will be driven to a point of desiring death and yet inwardly yearning to not die. This is where the parallelism of the passages finds its highest accentuation. Death, the feared entity of humanity, will be sought after as if a lover. And yet, he will flee from these men as if he were their greatest mocker.

<u>Life application:</u> There are many literary tools found in the Bible such as parallelism. They are given to help the reader understand the context, empathize with those referred to, find horror, suspense, or delight in what is being conveyed, and so on. Parallelism can be found in positive thoughts and in negative thoughts. A set of positive ones from the Psalms says –

> “You know my sitting down and my rising up;
> You understand my thought afar off.
> [3] You comprehend my path and my lying down,
> And are acquainted with all my ways.” Psalm 139:2, 3

Taking the words of John, and comparing them to known history, can then help us to understand what is being conveyed. In the Gulf War, the Iraqi soldiers who had been captured from the front lines made statements similar to what we read in this verse.

They had been under precision-guided attacks by the American forces and sat in their tanks waiting and wondering when their time would be up. They had prayed for death

and it didn't come. The agony of the uncertain state they were in was so horrifying that all they wanted was for it to be over. They desired death, but it fled from them.

This is the same sentiment that will come again during this time of targeted attacks by the locusts of Revelation and the parallels are striking. One thing the people won't do, just as they didn't do in Iraq, was to commit suicide. The force and desire to live is strongest at one's own hand, but the desire to die is stronger when another may take it. It is a terrible state to be in.

As we read the Bible, let us consider the various types of literary tools that are employed, and then let us compare what is being said to things we know from our own experience. In this, we will have a better grounding in both the context and how it is worked out in human existence.

This LINK is to one site of biblical literary devices. Make yourself aware of them.

In knowing what is conveyed, we will be more responsible in our theology because we will be rightly analyzing what is stated. In this, we will then be rightly pursuing what the intent of the passage is. These things are given to properly unfold Scripture, and Scripture is given to properly reveal to us the One who came to lead us back to God. It is given to properly reveal JESUS!

Lord God, help us to get the message of Jesus out to the people of the world. It is a message of love, hope, and reconciliation with You. May we never tire in telling others of the wonder and majesty of the simple gospel of our salvation – Christ died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again the third day. Belief in this simple plan is what brings us back to You. Praise You, O God, for the simplicity of the gospel. Amen.

The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.
Revelation 9:7

In verses 7-10 John will describe the locusts from the abyss. The description of these locusts is John's best attempt at describing something he had never seen or even imagined. Further, he was looking into the far future, to a time when Israel would again be established in her land and when the nations would wage war with technology. He never could have imagined what he was seeing. The time prophesied by John appears to be now. Today appears to be the day. What John was seeing then is a common sight of modern man. With this in mind, he says, "The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle."

In John's time, horses prepared for battle stood upright, they stood in formation, and they were covered with any armor outfitted for them. They would have borne the insignia of the units they were assigned to, and they would have borne the colors of the Roman army.

In modern air forces, the same is true. Jet fighters are arrayed in formation, they are formed from a frame of metal and covered in sheets of metal, they bear the insignia of the units they are assigned to, and they bear the colors of the nation they represent. For John to see jets that fly, he would have certainly termed them "locusts."

To see the missiles and guns they employ, he would have certainly equated those things to the stings of scorpions. To see them lined up in preparation for take-off, he would certainly have equated them as horses prepared for battle. Understanding this, he then says, "On their heads were crowns of something like gold."

Of this, Vincent's Word Studies notes, "Not actual crowns, but as crowns. Milligan remarks that any yellow brilliancy about the head of the insect is a sufficient foundation for the figure."

This yellow brilliancy is an exacting description of the windscreens of a modern jet fighter. They have a microns-thick layer of gold plating to reflect the IR signature of the pilot and cockpit components. When the sun shines on them from the right direction, they reflect this gold very clearly. This is described on Quora.com by Bob Keeter, Former Sr. Systems Engineer at Dept of Defense Civilian –

"The gold coloring is actually a very thin sheet of gold sandwiched between the laminated sheets of acrylic or polycarbonate plastic that forms the canopy. On the EA-6B, the golden canopies formed a Faraday cage protecting the aircrew and the cockpit instruments from the high power RF transmissions from the jamming pods.

On other aircraft, the gold foil has the same basic function for a very different reason. The cockpit has many edges, corners and radar reflective features. By providing a smooth and opaque surface, a gold foil canopy reduces the radar cross section considerably, even for non-stealthy aircraft."

This is what John was seeing in the "crowns of something like gold." From there, he finishes this verse with, "and their faces were like the faces of men." Here, the word *anthrōpōn* is referring to the shape of humans, not specifically biological sex.

John is seeing modern jet fighters and also the shape of men in the cockpits. As their heads are covered in the helmets worn by fighter pilots, they are obscured to the point where John could only say that they are "like the faces of men."

John is certainly seeing and writing about both close up and far distant views of these jets. This will become even more evident in the next few verses. It is as if he is watching a movie and documenting what he has seen, but he is doing so from the perspective of a man who had never seen such things, and also as a man who lived in the Middle East at the time of the Roman empire.

In the previous verses, it said that "they were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads." This is the exact capability of modern fighters – targeted warfare with precision-guided munitions.

Life application: For millennia, the Bible has remained an almost impossible to believe sci-fi account, or it has been over-spiritualized to indicate demonic forces that never existed and that would suddenly come upon the earth – like Godzilla monsters.

However, with modern technology, a harmonizing of what is literal and what is figurative becomes more and more evident. This doesn't mean that we can be one hundred percent certain of every detail. But it does mean that the things described in the passage before us no longer need to be spiritualized. The events and advances of modern history and technology have finally caught up with what the Bible records.

In seeing the parallel between the two, our faith in God's ability to provide reliable prophecy should be greatly strengthened. And as all prophecy is intended to show us what God is doing in redemptive history in relation to Jesus Christ, we should have all the more surety in our hope in Him and His promises. Let us trust Him. Let us not waiver in our faith in JESUS!

Lord God, it is especially interesting to live in this day and time when the events of the Bible are becoming much more understandable. We know that because Israel is back in her land that the Day is drawing near for these events to occur and then for the return of Jesus Christ. May that day be soon! Amen.

They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' *teeth*. Revelation 9:8

In the previous verse, John began a detailed description of the "locusts" that he saw. The symbolism was clearly that of modern-day jet fighters. To this point, one might

include attack helicopters as well, though a later description seems to argue against that. What is presented is clearly that of jets, however. John is seeing them close up and from a distance, as if he is watching a movie about them. One minute he is looking right in the cockpit, and the next minute he is seeing them whir by overhead. Such is the case in this verse as he says, “They had hair like women’s hair.”

Women’s hair is long and flowing. The various locks will blow behind them in the wind, giving them a look of beauty and grace as they pass by. So it is with jets. Imagine the last time you were at an air show with jet fighters and the planes flew in all kinds of crazy ways and directions as the smoke-making device pumped away. What did it look like? Or when you watched an old-time WWII movie and saw hundreds of bombers flying to their targets, what did the skies look like as the contrails followed behind the planes?

In both instances, something like the long hair of a woman following behind was seen. At least, if you were John on the island of Patmos two thousand years ago, this is how you would describe the scene. In a battle of fighter jets flying to and fro, he would have seen locusts that “had hair like woman’s hair.”

And then after viewing the scene from a distance, he is brought close again to what he was just seeing from afar… a fighter jet flies by him! On the fighter are the traditional painted teeth of war pilots of battles past and battles yet to come. Some are painted like tigers or sharks and yes, some have teeth like those of the king of beasts. As John states, “and their teeth were like lion’s *teeth*.”

The lion is an animal that John was obviously familiar, both from Scripture where the lion is often described, and from his own personal witness (or he could not have made the comparison). As the locusts whirred by, he would see the terrifying painting on the fighter and stand in awe and wonder at what he was seeing in his prophetic vision.

<u>Life application:</u> From our modern knowledge of air forces and air war, it is apparent that when one stands back and reads these verses, they are not describing something spiritual, but rather something real. Real battles like this are coming to the land of Israel and the surrounding areas. What is being described is something John is being given a glimpse of. Great wars are on the horizon. They will affect the people and the nation of Israel and the nations coming against her.

John must have been dumbfounded and amazed at the sight he was beholding! We too should be amazed, but for an entirely different reason. What John saw so perfectly matches what we now know. It is impossible to not be amazed that the Lord presented

it so clearly and precisely to him. It is as if John was in a cave on Patmos watching a modern-day movie, but with his limited knowledge of the world of the future. As such, he was excitedly penning details that would not be understood for a full two thousand years.

In this, the prophetic vision confirms the reliability of the sacred word. The word of prophecy points to the truth of God in Christ. He has come, and His name is JESUS!

Certainly, Lord, You are in control of the future. If You can reveal such startling detail of future events to men who lived thousands of years ago, and which are even today being fulfilled before our very eyes, then You have all things in Your mighty grasp. Why should we fear when You know the end from the beginning? We can look to You and feel the comfort of knowing that all things are under Your control! Hallelujah and Amen.

And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. Revelation 9:9

John is attempting to describe the "locusts" he sees in his vision. So far, he has seen…

- They can be commanded.
- They can target their enemies without hitting objects around them.
- They are not given the authority to kill them, but only to torment them.
- Their torment is painful and so horrifying that those targeted will seek death and not find it.
- They are like "horses prepared for battle."
- They have "crowns of something like gold."
- They have the faces of men.
- They have hair like women's hair.
- They have teeth like lion's teeth.

In this, they have minutely described modern jet fighters and their ability to attack specific targets, destroying infrastructure while protecting human life. This is exactly what occurred during the Gulf War and other recent wars, such as in Israel's skirmishes against those in Gaza and elsewhere. The descriptions are exactly as you would expect from a man 2000 years ago. John now continues, saying, "And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron."

John, not having an understanding of modern metallurgy, describes a modern fighter as best as he could, saying "iron" instead of "titanium," or "aluminum." But the description is marvelously accurate other than the exact type of metal. To someone who had never

seen modern a jet fighter, it would appear as a locust with a metal breastplate. And more, John next says, “and the sound of their wings.”

First, John identifies the sound as coming from the wings. That precisely identifies this as a jet fighter, not a helicopter, a supposed human/angel hybrid, or a rocket. Rather, John is seeing modern jet fighters whose wings are “like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle.”

The comparison is so precise that it is uncanny.

If one watches a movie like Ben Hur and listens closely to the sound as the horses come by, the comparison becomes obvious. This link will take you to a suitable time frame from the classic movie.

From there, you can go to any recorded flyby of a jet fighter, and the sound is practically identical. This link is set to the appropriate time.

John used Roman-era sound that he was aware of to describe something that would not be known for two thousand years, and he did so exactingly. As you watch the jet fighter video, think on the other descriptions John has given concerning these “locusts.” They are uncanny in how beautifully John presented them as he wrote out the pages of Revelation on the exile island of Patmos.

Life application: John’s vision is a terrifying and tremendous comparison to a modern war waged with fighter jets that are specifically targeting infrastructure to weaken an enemy without killing people. The air force is using extreme restraint in their attacks. This is something one would expect from a nation not intent on destroying its enemies but only crippling their ability to retaliate.

One can see the future from John’s perspective, united with the reality of our modern-day, in what John is describing. This tells us that Jesus Christ, who relayed these prophetic visions to John, is the Master of time. He transcends it because He created it. He is not bound to it, and therefore He can present the future to us as if it has already come to pass. In Him is the spirit of prophecy because He is JESUS!

Lord God, it is amazing to read the descriptions of future events in Scripture and to see that they accurately and minutely describe visions that we can now properly interpret, such as the engagement of a modern battle with fully equipped jet fighters. We know that You are the Creator of time, and therefore You can and have revealed the future to us. We know that You are in complete control, and so we can trust in You to care for us,

just as You have promised. Praises to You, O God, for confirming Your word through prophecy to give us a sure and blessed hope. Amen.

They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months. Revelation 9:10

Over the past few verses, John has been describing the vision of the locusts. It is certain that the general idea is that these are modern jet fighters and that they are using targeted attacks against an enemy foe. These fighters have been sent out, not to kill the enemy, but to cripple them without taking life.

Understanding this symbolism, John begins this verse with, "They had tails like scorpions." Like his other descriptions, he is making a comparison to their function, not their appearance. The Pulpit Commentary, written before the age of jet fighters (19th century), understood this, saying, "Not that their tails possessed the appearance of scorpions ... but that their tails were like the tails of scorpions in respect of having stings in them."

With this correct understanding, John next says, "and there were stings in their tails." The sting of the scorpion is right at the end of the tail, and it is sharp and extremely painful. As the tail of a scorpion proceeds forward over the body of the insect, it is from the midpoint of the body, not from behind it. Likewise, a jet fighter will have its weapons under the wings, or under the main body, not at the head.

When shooting a missile, John would have seen it flying out from the body, rather than the front of the aircraft. He would probably have the idea of a scorpion in his mind. He is using a metaphor that best describes what he sees, both in the means of attack and in the effect the attack makes. From there, he then finishes the thought with, "Their power was to hurt men five months."

The exact duration of this particular aerial campaign is given, and the effects of it are succinctly stated. The intent is to hurt but not to kill. Obviously, this doesn't mean people won't die in such a battle. There is normally collateral damage associated with any aerial bombardment. But the intent of targeted attacks is to harm but not kill. This is what John is seeing and conveying to the one seeking to understand this future prophecy.

This air war will last five months. When the campaign ends, things will move into another judgment. All of this could be avoided, but man has other intentions than to

willfully submit to the sovereign authority of God. And so, the troubles will only increase.

Life application: For millennia, readers of the Bible have come to these words concerning the locusts, and their minds have strained to understand what is being conveyed. The most fanciful of descriptions have been given, attempting to align real living creatures with what John is writing about.

In other words, they have taken John's words as absolute truth, but there has been no ability to appreciate them from a known perspective. And so, their analyses have ranged from describing actual mutant locusts to various creatures that have never existed, but which must supposedly be coming in the future. We no longer need to wonder about whether they are real living creatures or not. We can know, with high reliability, that John is describing modern jet fighters.

With this understanding, we can also know that the events of Revelation are coming, and that we are right on the doorstep of that coming Day of the Lord. This future battle, now being described, will be done with precision-guided munitions that are used by an air force that has great restraint. Based on past history, this brings the number of modern countries down to just a few. Most countries go in to completely destroy the enemy without regard to human life.

Whether these prophecies are soon to pass or in the distant future, this will be the general idea. This will be a nation or group of nations that is restrained in their assault with highly destructive weapons.

For the believer in Christ, and apart from the words of naysayers concerning the rapture, the timeline of the Bible tells us that believers who have called on Jesus will be taken out before these events begin. The rapture, including its timing, is defined by the Apostle Paul. It is he who received his instruction directly from the Lord (Galatians 1:2), and it is he who then conveyed that to us. The mercy of God is coming upon his people, and it is because His Son has already taken our judgment upon Himself at the cross. Thank God for the sure promises that are found in JESUS!

Lord God, we can look at the pages of future prophecy given in Scripture, and the world cannot say that it has not been warned. Terrible times are ahead for those who fail to accept Jesus now. Your offer of peace through Him has been given. You are in complete control and have all things worked out in a way that will bring You great glory and that will also show that You are just when You judge. Truly, You are great – merciful and also righteous! Be exalted among Your people, O God. Amen.

And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon. Revelation 9:11

The description of the locusts (the jet fighters) is complete. But now we are given another insight concerning them. John now says, "And they had as king over them." These words definitively show that the "locusts" are not actual locusts. Locusts don't have stings, but they also don't have a king over them, as Solomon says in the Proverbs–

> "The locusts have no king,
> Yet they all advance in ranks;" Proverbs 30:27

These locusts do though. What is of great interest is that the New Testament writers almost always follow the Greek translation of the Old Testament when making citations. Understanding this, a clue as to who this king is may be provided in the Greek translation of Amos 7:1 –

> "Thus has the Lord God shewed me; and, behold, a swarm of locusts coming from the east; and, behold, one caterpillar, king Gog." Brenton Septuagint Translation

This verse from Amos not only refers to locusts probably in a figurative sense, but the Greek translation notes that they are led by a king, Gog. Scholars find this as a mistranslation or a corrupt reading, but it appears to be exactly what John is referring to. If so, the army of locusts (meaning jet fighters) would be a part of the coalition of forces under Russia as described in Ezekiel 38, and the battle would be definitely referring to forces allied against Israel.

To add into the speculation even more, the Hebrew reading of Amos 7:1 says –

> "Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, He formed locust swarms at the beginning of the late crop; indeed *it was* the late crop after the king's mowings."

This verse in the Hebrew text could possibly be referring to the rapture as it refers to the "king's mowings." In other words, the harvest of Christ at the rapture has passed, and now the "late crop" of the tribulation period is being referred to. If this is correct, and this can only be speculation, then two prominent truths can be discerned –

1. The rapture is pretribulation (something completely supported elsewhere in Scripture), and
2. The battle of Gog/Magog of Ezekiel 38 occurs after the rapture.

Of this king, John next says he is, “the angel of the bottomless pit.” This would then clearly define the king as a human being, even if under the power of the devil. Whether or not this king is the same as the angel referred to in verses 9:1 and 9:2 is debated, but it is certain he is a human here in verse 9:11. Of him, John continues by saying, “whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon.”

Both names to be given are to be taken as a personification of the person being described. The Hebrew word Abaddon here thus means Destruction. It is this king’s scriptural designation.

The word Abaddon is found five times in the Old Testament. The references are Job 26:6, 28:22 & 31:12; Psalm 88:11; and Proverbs 15:11. It must be noted that Abaddon is said to be under the full control and authority of the Lord in Job 26:6 and Proverbs 15:11. In other words, the Lord is in control of all of the events that take place, and nothing is “out of control” in regard to His plan and purposes.

John next finishes the verse with, “but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.” The word means “Destroyer.” It comes from a common word used over ninety times in the New Testament, *apollumi*. That means to destroy or perish. The word Apollyon is found only this once in the Bible.

Giving the name in both the Hebrew and the Greek is a common writing tool of John in his gospel. This clearly identifies the fact that Revelation, like all of the New Testament, was written in Greek, while translating the Hebrew for the reader. In this, it solidifies the meaning of otherwise doubtful words and phrases. It also draws the Bible into one unified whole, regardless of the language used in the original writing.

As another linguistic note, John uses the term *Hebraisti* to describe the language that the word Abaddon was translated from. Saying “Hebrew” here is correct. However, the term *Hebraisti* is only used by John, and it is found in his writings seven times. Several of those times, however, it is not referring to Hebrew, but rather to Aramaic – such as in the words Gabbatha and Golgotha. Thus, the term does not mean solely “Hebrew.” Rather, it speaks of the Semitic tongues inclusive of both Hebrew and Aramaic (Chaldee).

It is the Aramaic or Chaldee that became the predominant tongue of the people after the Babylonian exile, as is evidenced elsewhere in the New Testament. This is true of both the written alphabet and the spoken language.

Life application: As was noted in a previous commentary, the attacks of these "locusts" is direct and targeted in an attempt to avoid destroying the people. It is a common trait among the forces of the western world today.

While other armies wage war without any regard for who is killed, the battles and wars waged by various armies in the recent past have showed immense restraint in their conduct. The opposing forces are first "softened up" and allowed a chance to surrender. After this, the armies come at their foe with fully unleashed power and with the intent of subduing them. This appears to be the pattern of this future army of "locusts." As is seen in the above analysis, this is quite possibly the forces of Gog, meaning Russia. This would then align with the words of Ezekiel 38 –

> "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'On that day it shall come to pass *that* thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: **11** You will say, "I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates"— **12** to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places *that are again* inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land. **13** Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you, "Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your army to take booty, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great plunder?"'"
>
> -Ezekiel 38:10-13

The intent of the coming battle is not to destroy the people, but to take the spoil without completely destroying the land in the process. Both Ezekiel and John are confirming this is what is to be expected.

As a special note for the student of the Bible is that, since 2020, the possibility of the events described here in Ezekiel 38 are now much more plausible than they were previously. The nations mentioned: Sheba, Dedan and (the merchants of) Tarshish are coming into focus in a new way.

Sheba and Dedan are both located in the area in and around Saudi Arabia. Sheba is believed to be the Kingdom of Saba in southern Arabia. Dedan was a city-state and oasis area of north-western Arabia mentioned at times in the Bible.

The location of Tarshish is highly debated. Some analysis say it is Lebanon, some Spain, and some even England (and other locations). Regardless of that location, the text doesn't say "Tarshish," but rather "the merchants of Tarshish," implying trading

partners. Further, the term “all their young lions” speaks of the surrounding city states. This would be inclusive of all of the small countries that border Saudi Arabia – Bahrain, Oman, the UAE, and etc.

Only since the presidency of Donald Trump have these nations began to (and some have) make treaties with Israel. Hence, they are said in Ezekiel to not be a part of the attacking forces coming against Israel. Instead of being allied with the invaders, these states will instead stand back and keep distance from the invading armies who come for the spoil. The world’s alignment of nations is matching up with the biblical narrative, even before our eyes.

As for the layout of the battle in the verse being analyzed, the coming verses will show that after the air war has softened up the people of the land (meaning of Israel), a great force – inclusive of a coalition of armies – will then come by land in an attempt to complete the task.

The point of this is that Israel is still not right with the Lord. They have been returned to the land, but they are as far from Him as the rest of the world. The tribulation period is intended to bring Israel to the point where the only option left is to forsake their own self-reliance and pride, and to finally turn to the Lord. The book is written, and the events will come to pass. And those areas of Scripture that are not debatable as to their true meaning will finally be understood perfectly by those who see the events unfold before their very eyes.

The prophetic word has the ultimate goal of revealing Christ to the nations and Messiah to Israel. The point of it all is JESUS.

Lord, we know You have sovereign authority over everything that occurs in the world. Even great battles are directed by You to accomplish Your purposes. Nothing is out of Your control, and so we can rest in this knowledge, trusting that the displeasing events around us do serve a good ultimate purpose. Help us to remember this when we look at the immorality and wickedness that permeates the world today. You will bring it all to a satisfactory end, and You will be glorified as You do. Thank You for this assurance. Amen.

One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.
Revelation 9:12

John has seen the revealed trumpet judgment. This was most probably a judgment against Israel and which consisted of the locusts. They were jet fighters sent to soften up the land in order to make a land invasion easier. That is exactly what occurred in the

Gulf War, and it was an effective way of preparing the field of battle. With that judgment complete, John says, “One woe is past.”

The Greek literally reads, *Hē ouai hē mia*, or “The woe, the one.” With the completion of the first woe noted, John next says, “Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.” This next woe will continue, with interesting inserts, until verse 11:14 where the third woe will then be ushered in.

Further, it will come in conjunction with the sixth trumpet, and the third will come with the seventh trumpet. But the seventh trumpet will also be immediately followed by the seven “bowl” or “vial” judgments. These events are going through a progression, and they are only going to get worse, not better.

Life application: Surely the people affected by these judgments will be thinking that each trial will be the end of sorrows and that an era of peace will be ushered in – by the actions of man and through the leadership of the anti-Christ. However, such is not the case. The world has said to God, “We can do it without you.” And God will allow them to try. But man is not inherently good.

Rather, the Bible teaches that we are fallen and that we are corrupt by nature. Because this is so, we can only botch things up and make it all worse. The good we do, such as inventing things, writing poetry, and helping out the homeless is inevitably short-lived and overshadowed by the bad we do.

Without the light of Christ in the human soul, there is only darkness and a desire to shun God for self and for selfishness. Let us remember this, and then let us lean wholly on our Creator God, and not on our own understanding. The Lord will be with those who call on Him and He will never forsake them. This is the promise of God found in Christ. It is the reason He sent forth His Son. This is the wonder of JESUS!

Heavenly Father, thank You for the forgiveness of sins that comes through the shed blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus. We know that we don’t deserve the favor You have lavished on us, but because of Your great love and mercy for the work of Your hands, You have looked upon us and been gracious to us. We will ever sing the praises of Your name. Amen.

Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, Revelation 9:13

John had just noted the sounding of the fifth trumpet and the subsequent first woe. The swarm of locusts and the destruction they brought must have been amazing for him to behold. But now his attention is redirected to the heavenly throne room again with the words, “Then the sixth angel sounded.”

With the sounding of the trumpet, John continues with, “And I heard a voice.” The Greek reads, “And I heard one voice.” It is specific. There is one Mediator between God and man, the God/Man Christ Jesus. The symbolism of the golden altar was seen in Chapter 8 –

> “Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. **4** And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand.” Revelation 8:3, 4

The golden altar is the altar of incense. The incense is the prayers of the saints directed through Jesus Christ. The one voice John hears is said to be “from the four horns of the golden altar.” It is a remarkable statement.

In the construction of the altar of incense recorded in Exodus, the number of horns is never explicitly mentioned. Though implied, and unlike the brazen altar (the altar of sacrifice), the number was noticeably left off of the description of the golden altar. It was a significant omission. As four is the number of creation, the brazen altar having four horns signified the judgment on sin throughout creation. However, because Christ’s intercessory work is in heaven, no number of horns was stated. Thus, it reflected a transcendence from the earthly to the heavenly.

Now, however, the number of horns is explicitly stated. This is because the altar pictures Christ in His intercessory role. It is He who speaks for all people on earth – from every corner of it, north, south, east, and west. He alone brings the prayers of the saints to the throne. As it says, this altar is “before God.”

<u>Life application:</u> The events to come are happening because God’s judgment is due on the world that has martyred His saints and rejected Him and His offer of peace through Christ Jesus. When Christ mediates on behalf of His people, an answer is certain to come: judgment. And that answer is to be one of judgment. Israel has rejected the Lord, the people of the world have rejected the Lord. The events of Revelation are prophesied in advance to show what will happen to both as the events of redemptive history continue to unfold.

God does hear the prayers of His people because His people are in Christ. He will no more reject their calls than He will reject His own Son. However, how He responds is solely up to Him. We may think that He doesn't hear, but He does. And we may think He is unresponsive to our needs, but He is not. The plan must come to its fulfillment, and we must be patient in the process. But God does hear our prayers because our prayers are mediated through JESUS!

O Lord God, You have opened our eyes to future events while keeping some things hidden. In this, we can speculate on what those things mean. But no matter what our personal opinion about the hidden things may be, those things which have been revealed belong to us as a heritage and a means of understanding what is to come. Thank You for these insights. Amen.

saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." Revelation 9:14

The words now come from the "voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God," as was presented in the previous verse. The sixth angel just sounded, and now that voice speaks "to the sixth angel who had the trumpet." As noted in a previous commentary, the word angel signifies a messenger. Of the various views concerning who these angels are, one is that they represent the "seven Spirits of God" seen in Revelation 1:4, 3:1, and 4:5. If so, this is the Lord speaking as the Mediator of God's people now relaying the directive.

If such is the case, this doesn't mean the Lord has multiple personalities. Rather, it would simply be the word revealing the many roles of the Lord in a way that we can understand. Regardless of this, the words say, "Release the four angels."

The number four, though already explained, should again be defined here –

"Now the number four is made up of three and one (3+1=4), and it denotes, therefore, and marks that which follows the revelation of God, namely, His creative works. He is known by the things that are seen. Hence the written revelation commences with the words, 'In-the-beginning God CREATED.' Creation is therefore the next thing—the fourth thing, and the number four always has reference to all that is created. It is emphatically the number of Creation; of man in his relation to the world as created; while six is the number of man in his opposition to and independence of God. It is the number of things that have a beginning, of things that are made, of material things, and matter itself. It is the number of material completeness. Hence it is the world number, and especially the 'city' number." EW Bullinger

The main aspect of focus here is the thought, "of man in relation to the world as created." The world as created, and as it is being revealed now in Revelation, is focused on Israel. They are being brought through the tribulation to the point where they will call out to Christ. This is the purpose of their final seven years under the law. It is to bring them from the Mosaic Covenant to the New Covenant (as defined in Daniel 9:24-27). Understanding this, these angels are representative of the forces of man. They are to be released, allowing the great army to come against Israel. John says they are those "who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

One must understand the biblical significance of the Euphrates in order to understand why it is even mentioned. It is the outermost point of the land promised to Abraham –

> "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— **19** the Kenites, the Kenezzites, the Kadmonites, **20** the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, **21** the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." Genesis 15:18-21

It is the outermost point of the land held during the reign of Solomon (called "the River"), typical of the ideal that is anticipated in the millennial reign of Christ –

> "Judah and Israel *were* as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. **21** So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River *to* the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. *They* brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life." 1 Kings 4:20, 21

Beyond this river, and since the earliest times, this area has been in a state of war – physically and spiritually – against the forces of goodness.

The boundaries began at the time of Cain when he dwelt "in the land east of Eden." The two highlighted cites of the Bible are Jerusalem – the city of peace and the place where God dwells, and Babylon – the city of confusion and where wickedness dwells. In Genesis 14, the four kings of the area around the Euphrates come against five kings dwelling in the land of Canaan.

Later in the Bible, the king of Assyria is called the "rod" of God's anger (Isaiah 10:5) and is used as God's judgment against the northern tribes of Israel, carrying them away captive in 722 B.C. After that, the king of Babylon is used as God's judgment against the southern land of Judah, carrying them away in 586 B.C. In Jeremiah, Babylon is called "the hammer of all the earth." Jeremiah, writing in Habakkuk asks the question –

Why do You look on those who deal treacherously,
And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours
A *person* more righteous than he? Habakkuk 1:13

For a further analysis of this border, Vincent's Word Studies says –

"The Euphrates was known as the great River, the River, the Flood. It rises in the mountains of Armenia, breaks through the Taurus range and runs south and southeast until it joins the Tigris in lower Babylonia[.] Its total length is from 1,600 to 1,800 miles, and it is navigable for small craft twelve hundred miles from its mouth. It was the boundary-line of Israel on the northeast (Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:7; Joshua 1:4. Compare 2 Samuel 8:3-8; 1 Kings 4:21). It thus formed the natural defense of the chosen people against the armies of Assyria. The melting of the mountain snows causes an annual flood, beginning in March and increasing until May. These floods became an emblem of the judgments inflicted by God upon Israel by means of Babylon and Assyria. The brook of Shiloah which flowed past Zion and Moriah was a type of the temple and of its mighty and gracious Lord; and the refusal of allegiance to God by the chosen people is represented as their rejection of the waters of Shiloah which flows softly, and their punishment therefor by the bringing in of the waters of the mighty and great river (Isaiah 8:5-8; compare Jeremiah 17:13). To the prophets the Euphrates was the symbol of all that was disastrous in the divine judgments."

Understanding the symbolism of this great river, one could stop right here and exclaim, "Disaster is coming." And indeed, the verses ahead will reflect just this. The nations are coming against Israel because Israel has not yet come to Christ.

<u>Life application:</u> God has used the unrighteous to bring about His purposes against His people and to bring about His plans in a way that demonstrates His sovereignty over all creation. Nothing happens apart from the sovereign decisions of God – including the great battle to come in the judgment of the sixth trumpet.

As you read your Bible, look to the geography of the lands and see how God is using real locations to make spiritual applications. By understanding these things, your knowledge of world events will certainly be increased. But more, in every such description, you will also better understand the ongoing redemptive narrative. It is a narrative laid out by God with the intent of bringing man back to Himself. And He is doing this through His Son, our Lord JESUS!

O God, Your word is beyond compare. It is beautiful in all it teaches. Every time we look into it, we can be more amazed at the complexity and beauty of how it is arranged.

Every time we think we have a full understanding of all it contains, we will inevitably find ourselves realizing that it is far deeper and more glorious than we had previously imagined. Time and again, we realize what a treasure Your word is. Thank you for this precious and sacred word. Amen.

So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Revelation 9:15

The words here are in response to the voice from the horns of the golden altar commanding the four angels who are bound at the great Euphrates to be released. That response is now noted by John, saying, "So the four angels, who had been prepared." As seen in the previous commentary, these four angels are representative of the great army that will come against Israel. They have been restrained and now are to be released. With that stated, John continues recording the voice he has heard. It says, "for the hour and day and month and year."

The translation is correct, improving upon the failed KJV which says, "an hour and day and month and year." By neglecting to translate the definite article, the KJV makes the thought cumulative. Rather, the words speak of a set and particular time that was predetermined all along. Some translations make it even clearer by using the word "this." In essence, "they are prepared for this particular day out of all others in recorded history."

If this is referring to the battle of Gog/Magog of Ezekiel 38/39 (this is only speculation), then the precise timing of John's words can be matched with the precise wording of Ezekiel –

> "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Are *you* he of whom I have spoken in former days by My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for years in those days that I would bring you against them?'" Ezekiel 38:17

The prophets who prophesied did so because the future is determined. Thus, what they anticipated is set, sure, and will come to pass. This is exactly as they had spoken. The thoughts of verses coincide, calling out for the moment John is carefully describing.

John then finishes by noting that they "were released to kill a third of mankind." The aorist verb "were released" defines the thought of the set date. Though John wrote the words of Revelation over 2000 years ago, he wrote it as if the battle has already been waged. In his vision, the angels were released at the set moment and they have been released to kill one-third of the people.

The set number, "a third of mankind," must be viewed as an unknown at this point. Is it speaking of one-third of all humanity on the planet? Probably not. Is it speaking of one-third of the people of Israel? It is possible. Zechariah, prophesying of the future tribulation period, says –

> "'And it shall come to pass in all the land,'
> Says the LORD,
> '*That* two-thirds in it shall be cut off *and* die,
> But *one*-third shall be left in it:'" Zechariah 13:8

If this is one-third of the people of Israel, then it would mean a portion of that two-thirds is realized in this battle. Or it could be that it is speaking of one-third of all in the battle – on both sides. If this is the case, then it could be that far fewer of Israel will be killed in this particular passage.

In other words, if this is the same battle as mentioned in Ezekiel 38/39 (a possibility), it says there that almost the entire invading army will be completely destroyed (see Ezekiel 38:18-23 and Ezekiel 39:1-5). Thus, if one-third of all dies in the battle, and almost all the invading enemy is destroyed, it would mean a much smaller portion of the people of Israel would be killed.

Until the events actually come to pass, it is hard to be dogmatic. However, the words of Revelation 9:20, 21 would be easily explained by such a lopsided win. Little Israel, destroying such a vast invading army, would naturally feel superior and in no need of turning from their wickedness. Repentance comes through humility, and humility comes through defeat, not victory.

<u>Life application:</u> No matter how the numbers are divided, the statement "a third of mankind" means that the number of dead will be immense. In Ecclesiastes 3:1, we read these words –

> "To everything *there is* a season,
> A time for every purpose under heaven."

And in Acts 1:7 when asked about the coming kingdom, Jesus told His disciples –

> "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."

God has everything under His control, and this includes the resulting destruction of the great battles that lay ahead. These four angels have been prepared, and "they were released." It is done in God's mind. There is a logical progression to all things, and God knew before He created anything what that progression would be. All things are according to His purposes and we are merely participants in His great unfolding plan for the ages. We need not get concerned about the things that are ahead because God is completely in control of them.

And for those who have called on Him, His promises hold fast. No matter what comes, be it in life or death or in trials or ease, nothing can remove us from His powerful grasp. So, if the events of Revelation seem terrifying, just trust that God already knows His good plans and purposes for you. If you have called out to God through the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is the anticipation of eternal joy in His presence. Whatever evils come in this lifetime are fleeting in comparison. Be sure to accept the gospel by trusting in what God has done through the giving of JESUS!

Heavenly Father, when we see that You already know the future, it gives us great comfort. Even if things are troublesome in our own lives, we can be certain that these things will never spin out of Your control. And we can certainly know that all of our trials are being worked out for our good and for Your glory. Because of this, we can shout "Hallelujah!" Amen.

Now the number of the army of the horsemen *was* two hundred million; I heard the number of them. Revelation 9:16

These words refer back to verse 9:14 where it spoke of the "four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." Of this great coalition, John says, "Now the number of the army of the horsemen."

Here the term *strateumatōn*, or "armies," is a plural noun. That is followed by *tou hippikou*, the horsemen. It is a singular noun, thus speaking in the same manner as our modern term "cavalry." The singular speaks of the whole. A suitable translation would be, "Now the number of the armies of the cavalry." Thus, this is a coalition of forces uniting into one giant cavalry.

Of this massive coalition, it next says it was "two hundred million." The Greek reads, *dismyriades myriadōn*, or "two myriads of myriads." The myriad at John's time was a group of ten thousand soldiers. However, the term was also used to express an extremely large number without specificity. It is used in this way in Acts 21 –

> "And when they heard *it,* they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; **21** but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs.'"
>
> -Acts 21:20, 21

Therefore, the number is expressed in various ways by different translations –

twice ten thousand times ten thousand (NIV)
200 million (NLT)
two hundred million (BSB)
two hundred millions (WNT)
twice ten thousand ten thousands (BLB)
two hundred thousand thousand (KJV)
200,000,000 (CEV)
20,000 times 10,000 (GWT)
two myriads of myriads (YLT)

As the word is preceded by a number (two), it is most probable that this is not simply an attempt to speak out a superlative, but is rather a number that closely describes the actual size of the force, being rounded off accordingly. In other words, a force of around two hundred million people will be gathered to come against Israel after they have been softened up through a five-month long aerial bombardment. To ensure that his number is taken literally, as intended, he concludes the verse with, "I heard the number of them."

In Daniel 7, a vision is given of a heavenly scene. There it says –

> "A fiery stream issued
> And came forth from before Him.
> A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
> Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
> The court was seated,
> And the books were opened." Daniel 7:10

There, as in Jude 1:14, it speaks in superlative terms without specificity. It is a way of saying, "a great and large number." However, John gives a specific number, and then he states that he heard the number. Therefore, this is to be taken as the actual force. It is an immense number of cavalry forces.

Life application: This is an amazing prophecy for John to have seen. At the time this was written, it would have been unknown if there were even that many people on earth. Because of this, scholars have for generations thought that the number was merely symbolic of something. This is most unlikely because John adamantly confirms the number. It shows that the prophecy is in the far future from John's time. It is in a generation when an army of this size could be brought together. And today it is not just possible, it could occur in a short amount of time by nations uniting against a common foe.

What John saw and heard is both realistic and yet future. When it occurs, it will be because the world is being directed into a whirlpool of destruction because of its failure to acknowledge God and simply call on Him for direction. It is a world that has rejected the true path to restoration. They have rejected JESUS.

O Lord God – Creator of heaven and earth – You have given us every opportunity to simply bow the knee and call out to You in faith. You sent Jesus to show us the true avenue to peace, and yet we have continuously rejected Your gracious offer. And because of this, we have faced and will continue to face many trials. Righteous are You when You judge, O God. Amen.

And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.
Revelation 9:17

The previous verse described horsemen totaling two hundred million men. If there are horsemen, then they are riding horses. But John is not understanding modern warfare, and so the horses he will describe are horses in name only. In order to convey to us that they are not really horses, but that they perform the same job as horses in cavalry, he says, "And thus I saw the horses in the vision."

In other words, he is describing what he sees as horses, even though they are not horses. With that understood, he next begins to describe them saying, "those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red."

John is providing the reader with the national colors of the armies who ride on these "horses." The Greek words for all three of these colors are found only here in this verse. The question here is, "Are all the colors one standard, like the US flag, which is red, white, and blue. Or are they each the main color of a single country within the coalition?"

There are a few countries that have the color combination of all three of these colors, but none are significant enough (at this time) to be a major player in such a battle. Therefore, it is probably (though not definitively) three different predominant colors.

The first is *pyrinous*, or "fiery." Thus, it signifies a bright or glittering red. It is a common color of many commie countries such as Russia, China, and so on. Therefore, one cannot dogmatically say it is one particular country.

The next is *hyakinthinous* or "hyacinth." It is dark purple or blue. Again, a particular country cannot be dogmatically barked out as being the main country.

The third color is *theiōdeis*, or "sulphur" (brimstone). It is a yellowish color. One possibility for this color is that it is the yellowish painting found on tanks in desert battle colors today, regardless of national designation. John could be seeing tanks with this desert-like color and is describing it as such.

For example, when fighting in northern densely forested climates, tanks will be repainted darker green to match the surrounding area. The yellowish color might then be what John is seeing in a desert climate of the Mideast. Again, to be dogmatic about a battle which is future, and that concerns the three colors John is seeing, is not the smart option. When the battle comes, the colors will match what John sees. This is certain.

With the colors defined, John next begins to describe the "horses," saying, "and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions." Having never seen a modern mechanized cavalry force, John would use terminology that he was familiar with. And yet, what he saw, and the way he describes it, is exactly as we would expect for a modern force of tanks.

On top of the tank is a turret. One could see that as the "head" of the horse. Out of the turret comes the cannon, and that is how John is seeing it. The horse's mouth is at the front of the head, pointing forward. It is at the end where the animal breathes and snorts. In saying that the head is like the head of a lion, he is describing the ferocity of the head of a tank, which roars as it expels its ammunition. And of course, John nails that description with the final words of this verse, saying, "and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone."

This is exactly what proceeds from the fierce and angry mouths of modern mechanized armaments. There is a sudden bursting forth of fire when the projectile is expelled. From there, smoke immediately follows it, billowing out of the "mouth" of the barrel.

And then from there, the sight and smell of brimstone he is perfectly describing the sulphurous mixture.

From there, the projectile hits its mark, and the same thing is again seen as the explosion erupts in fire, smoke, and brimstone. John is seeing a massive battle which is yet future, and he is describing it in terms that even a person would describe it today if they had never seen a tank. Good job John!

For a short demonstration of these massive "horses" of destruction, go to this link.

Life application: The Lord, through John, has given us a sure insight into the future. Based on the size of the army the location that they are recorded as having come from, we know that the events are ahead of us. They will be fulfilled at some point just as John has seen them. The book of Revelation is describing what is coming against Israel someday.

As terrifying as it is, the Lord covenanted with Israel to always preserve them as a people, even through their times of anticipated destruction. When the Lord speaks, He performs. In the New Covenant, the Lord has provided those who come to Him in faith with a deposit, or guarantee, of our salvation – the sealing of the Holy Spirit. Let us trust that God's promise is greater than our failings. Just as He has kept and preserved His promise to Israel, so He will do for His redeemed. This is because He is faithful. The blood has been shed, the substitution has been made, and His people have been saved by JESUS!

How wonderful to know that the Bible proclaims future events for man to know, with absolute certainty, that You, O God, have all things under control. When the world seems to be spinning into chaos, and when the leaders of the world's nations have become completely corrupt, we know that it is a temporary blip on the calendar. They will be swept away in their unrighteousness, and Your people will dwell in safety, peace, and joy. Thank You for these sure and glorious promises, O Lord! Amen.

By these three *plagues* a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. Revelation 9:18

Here we have the results of the battle waged in the ground war. Of it, John first says, "By these three *plagues*." The word "plagues" is inserted here for clarity, but some manuscripts actually include the word. Either way, the intent is that the effects of the artillery and tank warfare are that "a third of mankind was killed."

The question is, “Does this refer to the whole world, or is it referring to all who are engaged in the battle, or is this the number of those who are killed in Israel?” The first option is unlikely. This is a localized battle. The second option is possible, but if it is the same battle as described in Ezekiel 38/39, it is also unlikely. This is because Ezekiel 39 seems to indicate a complete rout of the invading forces. It will be so catastrophic for them that Israel will spend seven years cleaning up the battlefield and burning that which is left behind in the devastation.

Therefore, if it is the same battle, this is probably referring to one-third of those in the army of Israel, or even one-third of the population who are targeted along with the army. As always, being certain is impossible until the event takes place. However, the means of death is not uncertain. John says the “plagues” are “the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.”

In other words, the cavalry of tanks and artillery assembled in the battle will destroy one-third of those it has come to destroy. What is a possible (mere speculation) scenario, if this is the same battle as Ezekiel, is that Israel will see the likelihood of being completely defeated, and so they turn to the use of some type of WMD to end the battle. If so, it would need to be a weapon that can destroy like a nuke, but without the radioactive effects of a nuke.

Jimmy Carter outlawed the construction of a neutron bomb during his presidency. However, it is believed in certain circles that Israel pursued and developed such a weapon. From Wikipedia –

“It is believed that Israel had possessed an operational nuclear weapons capability by 1967, with the mass production of nuclear warheads occurring immediately after the Six-Day War. Although no official statistics exist, estimates of Israeli nuclear weapons range from 75 to as many as 400. It is unknown if Israel's reported thermonuclear weapons are in the megaton range. Israel is also reported to possess a wide range of different systems, including neutron bombs, tactical nuclear weapons, and suitcase nukes. Israel is believed to manufacture its nuclear weapons at the Negev Nuclear Research Center.”

Because this is so, the scenario above is actually quite likely. Israel faces the giant invading force, defeat appears imminent, Israel deploys a neutron bomb (which does not cause the fallout a nuke would), and thus Israel is able to effectively clean up the battlefield without the harmful effects that would otherwise hinder such an operation. Of course, this is entirely speculation, but the certain aspect of it is that the battle Ezekiel describes will come to pass, and the battle that John describes will as well.

Life application: God has promised to always protect Israel and keep her from complete annihilation. And this, despite her disobedience. It is to Israel that Jesus will return and so this promise stands firm –

> "You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes."
>
> -Ezekiel 38:16

> "And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who *are* with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord." Ezekiel 38:22, 23

The faithfulness of the Lord is at stake when it comes to the preservation of Israel. He has spoken, and He will accomplish. This is because He is ever faithful and true. He is JESUS!

Lord, we know that perilous times are ahead, and that Israel will not be excluded from them. But we also know that You are in complete control of all things and that You will protect them for Your holy name's sake. Thank You for Your faithfulness even when we aren't faithful. What a great and awesome God You are! Amen.

For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm. Revelation 9:19

In this verse, John continues with his description of the horses which he has been conveying. Clearly, his words refer to modern mechanized vehicles, and especially that of tank warfare. In his continued words, he says, "For their power is in their mouth." He is adamantly proclaiming that what was stated in verse 17 is correct. There, he said, "and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone."

At John's time, who would believe such a thing? Because of the incredible nature of the matter, he is reiterating it to ensure that we know that what he said is exactly what he meant. Because it seems so incredible, the thought has long been spiritualized. But to ensure that this means of interpretation is understood to be incorrect, he next says, "and in their tails."

Someone spiritualizing these verses might say that the power in the mouth of these horses is referring to powerful demonic orators whose mouths destroy those they speak of. And this would not be an unfounded analogy. But what about the tails having power? This too could be spiritualized, right from Scripture –

> "The elder and honorable, he *is* the head;
> The prophet who teaches lies, he *is* the tail." Isaiah 9:15

One could make the argument that this power in the tails is that of false prophets teaching lies. However, with all of the symbolism taken together, and with an understanding of modern air and ground wars, those interpretations must be excluded. The precision of the terminology is such that these words really should be taken literally. Especially when the number of those included, and the ratio of those who will die, are exactingly stated by John.

With this approach understood (meaning a literal interpretation), what is the power in the tail? The secondary weapon systems on tanks are their machine guns, often at the back of the tanks. These cover the rear flank and, sticking out as they do, would appear like tails to John. To continue with his first-century analysis of a 21st-century battle tank, he next says, "for their tails are like serpents, having heads."

Serpents are long and thin. This is true in comparison to the larger canon of the front. Further, in saying they have heads, John is conveying the thought that they can spit out venom. Just as the main barrel spits out fire, smoke, and brimstone, so these also are able to spit forth. Because of this, John says they have heads. And the analogy continues when considering the sound of a machine gun, almost hissing as it ejects its many bullets (listen here for a demonstration that would have led John to make this close analogy).

With this understood, John next says, "and with them they do harm." That is a most apt description of the effects of a large caliber machine gun as its lethal rounds tear apart other vehicles and humans, and the sand and rock spit up all around as the bullets land around their intended targets.

Life application: The vision only becomes clear in modern times and it points to the fact that Revelation was and is a book of prophecy about a future battle, not something which occurred in his lifetime. Those who want to claim that the church replaced Israel will argue that all of the events of Revelation are past, but this is simply a bad analysis of the timeline, the purpose of the book, and of the meaning of this symbolism that is given.

We are living in exciting times and the events of Revelation are coming nearer by the moment. Maybe they will even occur in our lifetime. In saying that, it is not meant that we will be here. The Bible teaches a pre-tribulation rapture. However, the events may be coming in the span that comprises that of a person alive today.

If this is so, thank God for what His word says concerning our deliverance from this coming world of woe. Thank God for the sure promises found in our Lord, Christ JESUS!

Thank You, Lord, for giving John the visions which we see recorded within the book of Revelation! Because we have an understanding of what he saw, we can look with confidence concerning the events of the book, knowing that You are in complete control of the future and that You have a plan laid out for the people of God. Our confidence and hope are in You! Amen.

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. Revelation 9:20

As noted in the 9:18 commentary, the extent of the word "mankind" here is actually uncertain. It is probably referring to those in the army of Israel, or even the population who are targeted along with the army. In other words, it says that "a third of mankind was killed." That would, at this time, leave two-thirds. As John says, "But the rest of mankind."

If this is referring to the same battle that Ezekiel prophesied about, despite losing one-third of the population, the victory over the enemy is so great that it would still be considered a massive accomplishment. In such a state, John says of those "who were not killed by these plagues," that there will be no change in their attitude.

Sometimes calamity will bring people closer to God. However, when there is a great victory at the same time, the opposite can be true. The dead are mourned, but the people as a whole feel proud, self-righteous, and seemingly invincible. This appears to be the case here because John says that they "did not repent of the work of their hands."

If speaking of Israel, as it appears to be the case, they are stuck in idolatry to this day. They have idolatry of self, idolatry of culture, idolatry of nationalism, idolatry of wealth, power, and status. They also have idols throughout the land. It is not uncommon to see buddhas in houses, eastern spiritualism permeates many in the society, and so on. For the most part, they are a secular society that lives very similarly to those in the US and

elsewhere. The religious Jews are not religious for the word of God, but for the teachings and traditions of their sages as found in the Talmud.

This is not to beat up on the people. Rather, it is a simple fact. In following any such idol mentioned above, or any other that they follow (and the list is as long as with any other nation), they are not following the Lord. He presented Himself to them and confirmed that He was the fulfillment of their own Scriptures –

> "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. **46** For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. **47** But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" John 5:45, 46

If one is not following the Lord (Yehovah of the Old Testament who has come as Christ Jesus in the flesh in the New), they are – by default – following the devil –

> "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources,* for he is a liar and the father of it. **45** But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. **46** Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? **47** He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." John 8:44-47

The thing about Israel (and the world at large today that now has Scripture) is that not only have they followed after countless other gods, but they have rejected the Scriptures. It is these that tell of Jesus (as noted above) as well as the battles that will come. The truth is clearly laid out in them, in minute detail. If they simply made themselves aware of the contents of the word, they would be able to see that the battle now being described was prophesied in advance.

However, as John says, they have failed to come to the Lord so "that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk."

The constant failing of Israel (and indeed the whole world, but the focus is on Israel here) is that they have, even since their inception, followed every "god" they could conjure up. They have followed demons (e.g., 2 Chronicles 11:15), and they have followed idols of gold, silver, brass, and wood (e.g., Hosea 8:4). In this, they have traded the living God for those things.

And not only will they not give up such things after this terrifying battle is complete, but they will continue with their abominations as is noted in the verse to come.

Life application: Judgment has been brought about in the fifth and sixth trumpets, which are the first and second woes. These battles comprise the aerial assault and then a ground invasion. However, there has been no change in heart – no repentance and turning to God.

Instead, they have continued in the worship of things made by their hands. Anything that we can form is formed out of something that God has made. Therefore, it is not God. The bizarre thought process of worshipping an idol of this sort, along with the irony involved, is laid out clearly in Isaiah 44:6-20. Take time to read that passage, but here is a portion of it –

> "He burns half of it in the fire;
> With this half he eats meat;
> He roasts a roast, and is satisfied.
> He even warms *himself* and says,
> 'Ah! I am warm,
> I have seen the fire.'
> **17** And the rest of it he makes into a god,
> His carved image.
> He falls down before it and worships *it,*
> Prays to it and says,
> "Deliver me, for you *are* my god!" Isaiah 44:16, 17

In the list provided by John in this verse are a host of materials used in idolatry – gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood. But the list is started with the thought that they are really worshipping demons. Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 10:20. Demonic activity is behind all idolatry. Any worship of a physical, tangible, created substance is error.

For proper worship, we are only to look to God, the Maker of all things, and not to the things He has made. The Bible says for us to fix our eyes on Jesus. The word reveals Jesus to us, and Jesus reveals the Father. Why should we look anywhere else for our heart's desire when He is the Source of all things?

Lord God, how far we have fallen! We direct our eyes away from You and instead lavish our attention and devotion on mere things? Forgive our wicked hearts. May we always remember that You are the Creator and that all things have come from You. May we

never set up an idol in our home or in our heart, but instead may we worship You alone. Amen.

And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. Revelation 9:21

In the previous verse, it says that mankind (see the explanation of the meaning of "mankind" in that verse) "did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood." John continues with that sentiment in this final verse of chapter 9.

In addition to those abominable practices, he says they also "did not repent of their murders." The word is *phonos*, and it signifies intentional, unjustified homicide. It was first used in Matthew 15:19 –

> "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

In the Old Testament, there are various words used for killing another, but the term "murder" translates a word first used in the giving of the Ten Commandments. Like the Greek, it is an unauthorized killing of another. However, in the Old Testament it could be either intentional or unintentional. Any unauthorized slaying is defined by the same Hebrew word. And yet, refuge could be given to a person who did not intentionally commit the act. That is defined in Numbers 35. The words of John here in Revelation indicate a willful and intentional act based on the fact that there is no repentance for the deed.

John continues with his words by also noting that the people did not repent of "their sorceries." The Greek word is *pharmakos*. It signifies sorcery, but it is based on the idea of "using *drugs* and 'religious incantations' to drug people into living by their *illusions* – like having magical (supernatural) powers to manipulate God into giving them more temporal possessions" (HELPS Word Studies). One can see the basis for our modern word "pharmacy" in it.

The word is found only in Revelation (three times), along with its associated word *pharmakeia*, which is found in Galatians 5:20 and once in Revelation 18:23. What is probable is that both basic meanings equally apply here – sorcery and drug use. Both are common in the world today, and the legalization of drugs has become increasingly prevalent, including in Israel.

Next, John says, or their sexual immorality. Sexual intimacy is expected to be between man and woman, and within the bonds of marriage. Any other sexual acts are to be considered immoral. Obviously, this is no longer accepted by society in general where every possible perversion of this precept is considered normal and acceptable. But this is not simply a precept to casually overlook. It is stated to be unacceptable even until the last page of Scripture, along with other perversions of what is right –

> "But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." Revelation 22:15

Sexual immorality, of all types, is now widely promoted in the nation of Israel, showing that they are not only not immune from judgment, but that they can and should expect it for their unholy conduct.

John then finishes the list, and the chapter, by noting "their thefts." Thieving is repugnant because it is taking what doesn't belong to someone without care or concern for the work and time of the one being stolen from. The other sins will often take up a great deal of time and expense of the offender, who is only bent on more sin, so the easiest route to feed their debauchery is to steal from others. For these acts, continued judgment and woe is coming on the world, especially upon Israel who bears the name of God. Before Christ returns to this wayward people, they must be purified and made ready.

<u>Life application:</u> Man is created in God's image and to kill another human is therefore an attack against God's image-bearer. The Bible only gives one penalty for murder – the ending of the life of the murderer. When a society fails to execute one guilty of this capital crime, it is actually a secondary attack against God. And this is what we see in the liberalizing of our judicial systems around the world. Murderers are given light sentences in court and this only leads to more murder.

Likewise, the other crimes against God that are noted in this verse mar the image of God in the people who do such things. When they continue to occur in society, the society devolves into an unholy congregation of wickedness. Even if the society seems progressive, and projects an attitude of caring and "social justice," the corruption is clearly evident when compared against the standard by which man will be judged – the Lord Jesus.

He is the embodiment of the law, and He offers His perfect performance under the law to anyone who will receive it by faith. This is what it means to be brought into the New Covenant through Christ's shed blood. But for those who fail to come to Him, the severe

judgment of God will be meted out. This is true for each individual, but it is also true on a national scale for Israel. Only after they are purified will He return to them.

For today, consider your standing before God, do what is right and wise, and call on His hand of extended mercy... call on JESUS!

Lord Jesus, when we read the Bible's list of things that offend You and that bring about Your wrath, we each know that we have participated in many of those things as well. And yet You extend mercy upon us when we come to You through Jesus. We can only pray that You will call the hearts of the unrepentant back to You, just as You have done for those of us who have called on Jesus. Thank You for Your grace and mercy. Amen.

CHAPTER 10

I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow *was* on his head, his face *was* like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. Revelation 10:1

Chapter 10 begins a new scene, but it is from an earthly perspective. John begins with, "I saw still another mighty angel." This is certainly another revelation of Jesus Christ, as will be explained as the chapter unfolds. The word translated as "mighty" has been seen in Revelation 5:2. The word is being used to reveal the nature and character of the Lord for this particular unveiling. Everything about the presentation supports the notion of His might. It next says the Angel is "coming down from heaven."

As he is seeing the Angel coming down from heaven, it signifies John is seeing things from the earth. The statement of John is reminiscent of the statement Jesus made in John 1:51 –

> "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

The previous verses have been centered on battles occurring on earth. Now this Angel is coming to that realm. John then further describes Him as "clothed with a cloud." It speaks of divine glory surrounding Him. Several times in Revelation, a cloud is mentioned in connection with the Lord (1:7; 10:1; 14:14-16), but more, the Lord is seen to ascend or descend in a cloud numerous times. This is an indication that this Angel is the Lord. And again, John says, "And a rainbow was on his head."

The symbolism is first seen in Ezekiel 1:28 in relation to the Lord. This ties the Angel now in Revelation directly to the Lord of the Old Testament. The Angel is Jesus –

> "Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the brightness all around it. This *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."

The rainbow also corresponds to the rainbow around the throne in Revelation 4:3. The rainbow, then, accompanies the Lord who is on the throne and who is now descending. The Greek word translated as rainbow is *iris*. It is seen only here and in verse 4:3. The rainbow is a symbol of divine mercy as well as His faithfulness in relation to that mercy.

The allusion to the bow in the cloud from Genesis 9 is obvious. The reason for the accompanying rainbow now may be as indicated by Albert Barnes –

"The rainbow is properly an emblem of peace. Here the symbol would mean that the angel came not for wrath, but for purposes of peace; that he looked with a benign aspect upon people, and that the effect of his coming would be like that of sunshine after a storm."

Whether of mercy or of peace, the rainbow speaks to the deity of the Lord here. Next, John notes that "his face was like the sun." This takes the reader back to verse 1:16, another indication that this is the Lord. His appearance as the sun indicates that what He shines on is fully illuminated. The radiance of the light of life is in Him and it shines forth from Him. There is nothing that He will not see. All that is dark or hidden will be brought to light. It also probably is conveying the idea of the Lord coming in a benign manner. Were it otherwise, a dark cloud could be anticipated instead of the radiant sun.

And finally, John says, "and his feet like pillars of fire." This then refers back to verse 1:15. There it spoke of his feet being like fine brass that had been refined in a furnace. Brass speaks of judgment whereas fire speaks of purification as well as judgment. The idea of pillars is that of authority, strength, and stability, even permanence (see Galatians 2:9, 1 Timothy 3:15, and Revelation 3:12).

Everything about this Angel so far (and to come) speaks of the Person of Jesus Christ in His deity.

Life application: The Greek word *allos* used here, and translated as "another," can signify "another of the same kind." In other words, it can be (and most surely is) another description of the Lord – this book is the revealing or unveiling of Jesus and it is He who is being depicted.

This verse begins an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets, just as there was one between the sixth and seventh seals. This interlude will last for quite a while and the final trumpet isn't blown until Revelation 11:15. The majestic description of this portion of the heavenly vision is given to prepare us for the verses ahead – all of which are amazing and glorious.

The important point to remember is that God is in control. The future is laid out to show that He is both aware of it and is in control of it. He is revealing Himself to us in these many varied ways to help us have confidence that He is intervening at times in order to bring about the end that He has promised.

And with that thought in mind, we are to remember that He is doing it through His Son. The same One who came to die for us on the cross of Calvary, in order to redeem us, is now attending to the stream of human existence for the sake of those He has redeemed. Let us, therefore, not fret about the world events that would otherwise trouble our hearts. Instead, let us be filled with joy and hope as God continues to bring us back to Himself through our Lord JESUS.

Lord God, how beautiful it is to read the various descriptions given to us in Scripture that show us the glory and beauty of the heavenly realm. Above all, how wonderful is the majesty and splendor of Jesus, our Lord who rules at Your right hand. Thank You, O God, for the wonderful insights into these things. They give us hope in this fallen world as we look to You and your glory with amazement and anticipation of better days ahead! Amen.

He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, Revelation 10:2

John continues with the vision from verse 10:1 saying, "He had a little book." This is referring to the mighty angel coming down from heaven as detailed there. Every indication is that this is another aspect of the Lord Jesus. That will continue now in this verse. The Greek word translated as "book" is *biblaridion*. This is most likely a type of unsealed scroll, but not the same as the scroll that was mentioned in Chapter 5 where a different word was used.

The fact that it specifically notes it is a little book bears its own significance. Unlike the large scroll noted in Chapter 5, a title deed to the entire world, the contents of this book obviously have a narrower focus and scope to it. Albert Barnes provides his thoughts on this little book –

"A book, as such, thus borne in the hand of an angel coming down to the world, would be an indication that something of importance was to be communicated to people, or that something was to be accomplished by the agency era book. It was not, as in Revelation 6:2, a bow - emblem of conquest; or Revelation 10:4, a sword - emblem of battle; or Revelation 10:5, a pair of scales - emblem of the exactness with which things were to be determined; but it was a book - a speechless, silent thing, yet mighty; not designed to carry desolation through the earth, but to diffuse light and truth. The natural interpretation, then, would be, that something was to be accomplished by the agency of a book, or that a book was to be the prominent characteristic of the times - as the bow, the sword, and the balances had been of the previous periods. As to the size of the book, perhaps all that can be inferred is, that this was to be brought about, not by

extended tomes, but by a comparatively small volume - so that it could be taken in the hand; so that it could, without impropriety, be represented as eaten by an individual."

Without stating the purpose of the words, Barnes' thoughts are correct concerning what they convey. The words are important, they diffuse light and truth, they are short and concise in their volume and stated purpose, and they are intended to be transmitted in order to be understood. But what do the words of this small book proclaim? Without attempting to get too far ahead, the answer is found later in this chapter, but especially in the final verse of it where it says, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."

The importance of those words that is to be focused on now is the word "about." Some translations say "before" (or something similar), as if John is to preach before many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings. However, the Pulpit Commentary notes –

"...*concerning many peoples*, etc. (ἐπί, with dative). These are the objects of the prophecy, not the audience. This serves to explain the reference in the preceding sentence. The message is not delivered to, but about peoples, etc."

If this is so, and if it is a message being conveyed about "many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings," then who is the audience? The answer must be taken from elsewhere in Scripture. It should be noted that this particular type of scroll is only mentioned in this chapter of Revelation where it will be referred to three times (verses 2, 9, and 10). Of this book, John says it was "open in his hand."

Before going on, it is a good place to note that the tenth chapter of Revelation corresponds to the tenth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The tenth letter, *yod*, pictures an arm with a closed hand, and it signifies "hand," "work," and "throw," and "worship." In this chapter is found the little book in the hand of the angel.

The closed hand is holding the open scroll. This is unlike Chapter 5 where the scroll was *epi*, or "upon," the right hand. Here the scroll is *en*, or in, the hand. Having noted this, the reader is directed back to the book of Ezekiel where the prophet Ezekiel had a similar vision. There, the Lord appeared to him. While giving him instruction concerning his prophetic office, it said in Ezekiel 2 –

> "Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book *was* in it." Ezekiel 2:9

The viewing of this scroll was preceded by these words –

> "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. **4** For *they are* impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' **5** As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they *are* a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.
> **6** "And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns *are* with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they *are* a rebellious house. **7** You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they *are* rebellious. **8** But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Ezekiel 2:3-8

Ezekiel was told to go to the rebellious house of Israel. John is being instructed likewise. The previous trumpet judgment(s) were directed especially to the land of Israel. However, what will be said later about prophesying "about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings" is showing that John's words are to be conveyed to Israel about what has occurred among the Gentiles. Just as Ezekiel was directed to speak to Israel, so John is now. Remember, it is they who rejected Christ, and who were exiled in disbelief for two thousand years. Now that they are regathered into the land, they need to be reinstructed concerning Him. Thus, the contents of the book–

- Are important.
- They diffuse light and truth.
- They are short and concise in their volume and stated purpose.
- They are intended to be transmitted in order to be understood.
- They are directed to Israel again.
- They contain specifics about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.

What is it that the nations have heard and accepted that meets all of these points? It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. John is being shown that Israel will again be the focus of the conveyance of the gospel during the final seven years of Daniel's "seventy sevens" found in Daniel 9:24-27.

With that understood, it next says, "And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land."

This message that has been conveyed to the entire world is in His hand. Further, the Angel is claiming authority over both the sea and the land. In a display of complete

control over a vanquished nation, rulers of the past would go to the shore of the land and place their feet in this manner. It was a symbol that they held control over the entire realm. All trade, all industry, all the resources – all of it as acquired from the land or the sea – was under the authority of that ruler.

The Angel is claiming complete authority over the earth because He descended from heaven to earth. The Owner of the title deed to the earth, which was opened in chapter 5, is the One making the claim of total authority over the sea and the land in this verse. And, He has a book with a message to be conveyed with Him.

Life application: The amazing thing about our God is that He is sovereign over the world, and yet He allows us to disobey Him and ignore Him at will. Most sovereign rulers would simply snuff out those who rebel without giving them a chance, but God provides ample opportunity to the people of the world to turn to Him. The gospel continues to be conveyed, even during the times of His judgment upon peoples.

However, this is not to be taken as an excuse for putting off accepting His offer of peace. There is always an anticipated end to such disobedience when the cup of His indignation is full. It is eventually poured out in judgment. We, as His creatures, cannot be disobedient forever.

Lord God, it is so encouraging to know that despite man's constant rebellion toward you, we also know that You are so very patient with the sons of men. Instead of immediate destruction, we receive mercy and blessing from Your open hand of loving provision. Through Your goodness, You continue to call to us in hopes that we will turn to You and be saved. This, even when we fight against You. Thank You for Your longsuffering and kindness. Amen.

and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. Revelation 10:3

The words now refer to the mighty angel of the previous verses. It said he had a little book open in his hand, and he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. With that done, it now says he "cried with a loud voice." The words are certainly stated to provide emphasis. Having placed His feet on the sea and on the land, He was making an absolute claim over them both. The loud voice crying out accompanies that act in order to proclaim this. John then says, "as when a lion roars."

The Greek work *mukaomai*, translated as "roar," is found only here in the Bible. Vincent's Word Studies notes, "The verb here is originally applied to the lowing of cattle,

expressing the sound, moo-ka-omai. Both Aristophanes and Theocritus use it of the roar of the lion, and the former of thunder." Bengel then says that it "expresses the voice of an animal under the influence of hunger or anger."

This note of the roaring continues the emphasis. The lion is the king of his realm and the fiercest animal of his domain. When he roars, it is a sound of terror to those who hear it. The symbolism is one of ferocity and a source of great fear for all who hear it. It is loud and it elicits fear. The connection seems to be that the claim over the land and sea is made, but there are those who are rebellious still. The roaring is intended to let them know that the peaceful Lamb is also the terrifying Lion – the Lion of Judah (verse 5:5). In other words, this is another clue that the angel is, in fact, the Lord Jesus.

With this noted by John, he next says, "When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices." The Greek bears the definite article which should not be excluded – "the seven thunders." Much speculation is made concerning what these are. This is especially so because they are not mentioned anywhere else. However, a few points to consider are that the word translated as "thunder" is found seven times outside of Revelation 10 (meaning ten times total). It is always connected with events that occur around the heavenly throne. Also, the first time the thunders are mentioned was in verse 4:5 –

> "And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God."

It may be that the seven thunders are voices speaking out revelation from these seven Spirits of God. This seems more assured when considering that the voice of the Lord speaks out seven voices in Psalm 29 –

> [1]Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones,
> Give unto the LORD glory and strength.
> **[2]** Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name;
> Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.
> **[3]** The voice of the LORD *is* over the waters;
> The God of glory thunders;
> The LORD *is* over many waters.
> **[4]** The voice of the LORD *is* powerful;
> The voice of the LORD *is* full of majesty.
> **[5]** The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars,
> Yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon.
> **[6]** He makes them also skip like a calf,
> Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox.

[7] The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire.
[8] The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
The LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh.
[9] The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth,
And strips the forests bare;
And in His temple everyone says, "Glory!"
[10] The LORD sat *enthroned* at the Flood,
And the LORD sits as King forever.
[11] The LORD will give strength to His people;
The LORD will bless His people with peace.

Life application: The voice of God is majestic and marvelous, and with His utterances, great things occur. As the voice of God is recorded in the pages of the Bible, we should be looking there for our instruction, insight, wisdom, and counsel. Let us never fail to pay heed to what it says, applying His word to our conduct at all times.

We cannot know God without knowing Jesus, and we cannot know Jesus without knowing the Bible. Do you want to have intimacy with God? Read the Bible and there you will find the highest expression of His love and tender care for you. There you will find JESUS.

Lord, we know that we as humans have two choices: to hear Your tender call as the Shepherd of Your saved sheep, or to hear Your terrifying voice as the great Judge of lost humanity. We thank You for having called us out of darkness into Your light,and we pray for those we love who have not yet responded to this call. May You work upon their hearts and bring them to You. Amen.

Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them." Revelation 10:4

In this verse is an enduring enigma that has both tempted and frustrated scholars for millennia. John just wrote in the previous verse that when the conquering Angel cried out, the "seven thunders uttered their voices." John now continues that thought by saying, "Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices."

In other words, we are being shown – explicitly – that John wrote Revelation as the events came to his eyes. That corresponds with verse 1:11. There, it said, "What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches." John didn't see the events and

then write them down at some later point, but he was writing as he saw the visions. That is confirmed by the words, “I was about to write.”

Like a journalist taking down the events as they occurred, so John was compiling what he saw. This gives us the surety that what he saw was carefully and accurately detailed. With a large number of events, with many details in events, or with time between events, things can get jumbled up in the mind. To ensure that what was seen was recorded without any of these problems, John chronicled the events as they occurred. In the case of the seven thunders, John was just about to write them down. However, he was stopped from doing so. As it says, “but a voice from heaven said to me.”

Like several other times in Revelation, a voice speaks even though the speaker remains unidentified. However, it can be inferred that this is the Lord Jesus. This is because the Lord instructed him to write in the first place. As this is so, it would be the continued voice of the Lord, speaking out instruction concerning His word to the churches (as indicated above).

With this in mind, the voice then says to John, “Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them.” The seven thunders are the voice of the Lord speaking out seven truths, commands, prophecies, or etc. The Greek word translated as “thunder” is found only two times outside of Revelation. One is in the naming of John and his brother James “Sons of Thunder” in Mark 3:17. The other time is in John 12 –

> [27]“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. **[28]** Father, glorify Your name.”
> Then a voice came from heaven, *saying,* “I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again.”
> **[29]** Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.”
> **[30]** Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.” John 12:27-30

John is specifically told to not write down what these thunders state, clearly indicating that the thunders are conveyed as intelligent words. However, what is uttered is not to be recorded. This is similar to what was conveyed to Daniel –

> “But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.” Daniel 12:4

Daniel was given the word, but he did not understand what he was presented. Because of this, he asked about the matter (Daniel 12:8). From there, the answer was –

> "Go *your way,* Daniel, for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end." Daniel 12:9

What then is a possibility concerning these seven thunders is that the events that are now being recorded actually occur chronologically in conjunction with what is said in Revelation 8 where the same word translated as "thunder" is used –

> "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw *it* to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake."
> -Revelation 8:5

In other words, like the opening of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1) which may actually have preceded the events of Chapter 7, this vision John is now seeing is chronologically occurring before, or in conjunction with, the sounding of the seven trumpets. As confusing as this may seem, it must be remembered that the events from verse 10:1 through 11:14 are being inserted between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpet, just as the events of Chapter 7 occurred between the loosing of the sixth and seventh seal.

As noted in the Revelation 8:1 commentary, the same happens numerous times elsewhere in Scripture, such as where the book of Ruth follows the book of Judges, but its events occur during the time of the Judges. Thus, the main events of Judges are laid out, and then the information of Ruth (that occurred during Judges) is filled in afterward.

This seems more certain when considering what it will say in verse 10:7 –

> "but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets."

The mystery of God is finished at the sounding of the seventh trumpet. When the seventh trumpet is sounded (verse 11:15), it will say, "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

Therefore, the words of "seven thunders" are unknown, but the function of them is not. They are given to direct the events of the apocalypse through to its completion.

Life application: Because the voice of this verse comes from heaven and directs the Angel, some scholars have decided that the Angel can't be Jesus. But we have already seen on several occasions that Jesus fulfills sequential roles of the heavenly court – such as in Revelation 4 and 5 where Jesus is sitting on the throne and then hands the scroll to the Lamb who is Jesus. In other words, we are seeing the "unveiling" or "revealing" of Jesus. Just because we see sequential things occur from different places, and which include interaction between individuals who are present, it doesn't negate that they are all Jesus.

As for the words from Daniel 12 that were cited above, the book of Revelation is the "time of the end." It is revealing the things Daniel wasn't understanding. However, even in Revelation, there are things that are sealed. God has chosen to reveal His Son in the way which He has determined, and we are not privy to all of the information concerning the coming time of tribulation. His plan will come to pass as He directs, and in order for that to happen, the seven thunders must remain hidden.

Though what is said isn't revealed, it is surely a call for judgment. In Job 37, we read this parallel –

> "At this also my heart trembles,
> And leaps from its place.
> **2** Hear attentively the thunder of His voice,
> And the rumbling *that* comes from His mouth.
> **3** He sends it forth under the whole heaven,
> His lightning to the ends of the earth.
> **4** After it a voice roars;
> He thunders with His majestic voice,
> And He does not restrain them when His voice is heard.
> **5** God thunders marvelously with His voice;
> He does great things which we cannot comprehend." Job 37:1-5

In the end, we may not have the words of the seven thunders, but we can understand their function. Like the voice that thundered in John 12 (above), the purpose of the voice of the Lord is ultimately to reveal to us JESUS.

Lord God, it sure is exciting to see the events of redemptive history unfolding before our very eyes. And yet, there are things that are hidden from us as well. Because of this, we

when we read Your word, we stretch our minds - hoping to see that which is beyond our eyes. How wise You are in how You have presented the future to us. You provide enough so that we can know when You have acted to fulfill prophecy, but You withhold enough so that we must wait for the prophecies to come about. Thank You, O God, for giving us both hope in Your word, and surety in what it proclaims as it comes to pass. Amen.

The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven Revelation 10:5

John continues the vision of the "mighty angel" who came down from heaven as noted in verse 10:1. Of this Angel (capitalized because it is certainly referring to the Lord Jesus), John says, "The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land." That was noted in verse 10:2, and it was a note of claiming rule and authority over both the sea and the land and all business conducted in connection with them. It is a note of supreme authority.

While in this stance, John says He "raised up his hand to heaven." Many manuscripts say, "his right hand," and this might be the case here. The right hand is the hand that is often used in such instances of vows, blessing, and the like. Raising one's hand in an oath goes back even to the book of Genesis –

> "But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, **23** that I *will take* nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that *is* yours, lest you should say, "I have made Abram rich"— **24** except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.'" Genesis 14:22-24

The symbolism is that of calling on heaven to witness the act, and thus it is a solemn affirmation that what is stated will be performed.

This verse, combined with the next one to come, provides a reason why scholars have denied that this Angel is Jesus. In the next verse, the raising of the hand is accompanied by swearing by "Him who lives forever and ever." If this Angel is swearing by "Him who lives for ever and ever," the thought is that it cannot be Jesus because Jesus is God and it is He who lives for ever and ever. This logic is incorrect.

Deuteronomy 32:40, Jeremiah 22:5, Daniel 12:7, and elsewhere contain such vows made by the Lord when speaking of Himself. For the Angel to raise His hand to heaven and make such a statement in no way negates His deity.

The only thing that can be inferred from this verse is that an oath is going to be made, and it is being made by One who has authority over the sea and the land. Here is how the Lord presents His vow in Deuteronomy 32 –

> "For I raise My hand to heaven,
> And say, "*As* I live forever,
> **41** If I whet My glittering sword,
> And My hand takes hold on judgment,
> I will render vengeance to My enemies,
> And repay those who hate Me." Deuteronomy 32:40, 21

Life application: When God swears by Himself, in either testament, it is making a proclamation that what is said will absolutely and assuredly come to pass. We have every confidence that what God speaks is absolute truth and that the Bible is God's word.

Whatever God says, as is recorded in His word, is as an oath. This is because God is unchanging in His being. What He speaks forth will come to pass. And any promise He has made shall be fulfilled. God has spoken in His word that those who come to Him by faith in Jesus Christ will be granted eternal life. Be comforted in this thought and be confident in your salvation. God has spoken, and His Son has performed according to that word. We have a sure and eternal hope because of God's unfailing promise – the giving of JESUS.

We know, O God, that You can do all things and that You have all authority and all power. We also know that Your word is truth and that what You proclaim will surely come to pass. Thank You for having given us such confidence. By resting in Your truth, we can live at peace in this world full of trouble and trial. Amen.

and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, Revelation 10:6

The words continue from the previous verse where the mighty Angel raised His hand to heaven. John now says, "and swore by Him who lives forever and ever." Rather than "by," the Greek reads "in." He "swore in Him who lives forever and ever."

As noted in the previous verse, this is something the Lord does in the Old Testament. He will swear by Himself in order to stress the importance of a matter –

> "'But if you will not hear these words, I swear by [Hebrew *bi*: in] Myself,' says the Lord, 'that this house shall become a desolation.'" Jeremiah 22:5

Therefore, the words now conveyed by John do not negate the possibility of the Angel being the Lord Jesus, as some commentaries state. The words "forever and ever" are repeated from earlier in Revelation when speaking of Jesus, such as in verse 4:9, 10; 5:13, 14; and 7:12. It is He "who created heaven and the things that are in it."

This is Jesus, as noted by Paul in Colossians 1:15 –

> "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven..."

John continues with, "the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it." This is Jesus, as noted by Paul in the continuance of Colossians 1:15 –

> "...and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him."

The reason for swearing in this manner is to demonstrate the absolute surety of the statement to come. Just as the Lord has created all things in heaven and in earth by His own power and wisdom, so He is in control over those things. What He will speak is as certain to us as the nature of the very universe He spoke into existence. And even more certain because it is a result of His word. And the oath He makes is "that there should be delay no longer."

The Greek literally reads, "time no longer shall be." Various interpretations have arisen as to the meaning of this. One is that time, as it now exists, will end. In other words, the eternal state will commence. Another is that presented by the NKJV, "there should be delay no longer."

The second is correct. However, even that is then debated. Is it referring to an end to a time of repentance? Is it that when the seventh trumpet is sounded (see next verse) the end of the time set forth will come?

What may be the case is that the angel is responding to the call made back in verse 6:10–

> "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'"

The answer to their question was that "they should rest a little while longer." The Angel's oath now may be that the time to avenge their blood has come. It is hard to be dogmatic over the words as they are future to us now. However, because of the fact that the oath is made by the Lord Himself, that which is promised will surely come to pass.

Life application: What is seen here is a binding oath. It is one that reflects the very nature of God, who is everlasting. As the Creator, he existed before the creation and He will endure for all time, throughout eternal ages. The vow is eternal in nature and cannot be changed.

If this vow refers to the opportunity for repentance, it indicates that there is only a short time left to turn to righteousness. When the judgments arrive, it will be too late. With that thought in mind, it should be noted that each human already faces such a deadline. In reality, we don't know the moment of our death. It could be today in an accident or by the stopping of our heart. We could be killed by an intruder or choke on our dinner. We simply don't know the time of our end, and therefore we must be ready at every moment for the Lord to come for us. Let us be found ready.

And to be found ready means to be right with God. To be right with God is to have faith in His provision. And that provision is only found in the giving of His Son for our sin. Be right with God today. Call out to Him through JESUS.

Lord God, we have a date to meet You that was set before the creation of the world. And we do not know when that moment will arrive. Each of us is destined to stand before You in judgment. In Your wisdom, You created us and have allowed us to decide which path we will follow. May we make the right decision that is pleasing to You by calling out to Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins now. Help us to be wise in this. Amen.

but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.
Revelation 10:7

The wording of this verse anticipates what is coming in Chapter 11. In verse 11:15, the seventh angel will sound. For now, and in anticipation of that, it says, "but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel." The words are based upon what was said in the previous verse. There, it said, "that there should be delay no longer."

The words here are given to confirm that thought. However, there is not a set moment that he is referring to. Instead, it details events occurring over a period of time. As it

says, “in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel.” In other words, one might look at the birth of Christ. That happened at a set moment. However, someone may write about the events that were to occur at that time. In this, he would write, “In the days of the coming of Messiah such and such will be the state of the world.”

The sounding of the trumpet is a set event at a set moment, but the events leading up to it actually precede the event. This is then confirmed by the words, “when he is about to sound.”

The way these words are translated will make all the difference in how the events will be interpreted. Some translations to consider –

- when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished (NKJV)
- When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, God’s mysterious plan will be fulfilled (NLT)
- but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled (ESV)
- but in the days of the sound of the seventh angel, when he will blow his trumpet, then God's hidden plan will be completed (HCSB)
- When the time approaches for the seventh angel to blow his trumpet, God's secret plan will be fulfilled (ISV)
- but in the days of the voice of the seventh messenger, when he may be about to sound, and the secret of God may be finished (YLT)

These are but a few variations of these difficult words. In them are a variety of ideas about how the events will occur. However, the main two ideas are that either 1) the events will occur upon the sounding of the trumpet, or 2) the events will occur before the sounding. The verb is present subjunctive. The other two uses of the verb in this same form are found in Mark 13:4 and Luke 21:7. But even there, the words are variously translated.

The idea is that things will happen in a period of time surrounding the sounding. Thus, the words “when he is about to sound” give the right sense. The timing of the sounding of the seventh trumpet completes the set of events that occur. It does not initiate them. It is during this period that “the mystery of God would be finished.”

The word used as “mystery” signifies the things known only to God, but which are revealed by the unfolding of His plans. It is something not knowable except as is revealed specifically by Him. Thus, the mystery here is the consummation of the hidden

things of God. It is their final unveiling. With that understood, John finishes the verse with “as He declared to His servants the prophets.”

Here the word signifying the gospel, or good news, is translated as “declared.” God has declared that things will be made right. The world will receive its renewal, and wickedness will be eradicated. In the time when the seventh angel is about to sound, these things will be fully revealed. Matthew Poole seems to be correct when he says of this, “generally, whatsoever God hath revealed concerning the propagation of the gospel, the ruin of antichrist, and the end of the world.”

All of these things will have come to their completion when the seventh trumpet is sounded. John writes about it as if it is already accomplished because God is there at the end, revealing it to him for us to know that He is in control of what is coming.

Life application: A mystery in the New Testament is something that was previously unknown, and which is now revealed. There are several mysteries spoken of by Jesus and the apostles. The Old Testament saints saw, for example, a time when there would be great tribulation on earth and they also saw a time when there would be a reign of righteousness on earth. When these and many other things were declared to them, they wrote them down, but they didn’t understand how these things tied together with the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Peter describes this process in his first epistle –

> “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, **11** searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. **12** To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.” 1 Peter 1:10-12

We now have a fuller description of these things, and many of the things that were hidden are now more fully explained. However, the actual events still need to be unfolded in the stream of time. We are provided with the outline of those events. These are stated as absolute assurances, or as accomplished facts, thus giving us complete confidence that what is prophesied is as good as done. With this thought, we can then be fully assured that we will be tended to as God has promised. As we who have called on Him through Christ are now “in Christ,” our worries should be behind us. He could no more reject or abandon us than He would do so to His own dear Son, JESUS.

O God! How blessed we are to read the words of Scripture and to see that it is all accomplished in Your mind. We are just watching the events that You have told us about unfold before our eyes. May we handle this knowledge with great care, knowing that it has been given for our understanding of what is to come and for our comfort that You have it all under control. Amen.

Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, "Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth." Revelation 10:8

In his vision, John is positionally on the earth. This has been the case, and it continues now. Here, we read, "Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again." This is the voice referred to in verse 10:4 that directed John to not write what was uttered in the seven thunders.

As this voice is "from heaven," then John is on the earth. John's position within the visions of Revelation has migrated back and forth between heaven and earth. At times it requires careful attention to see when the change from place to place occurs.

With this understanding, John continues. The voice he hears says, "Go, take the little book which is open." Because the voice notes the book is "open," it is an important detail. If it was closed, it would mean the contents were closed up and not discernible. This is seen, for example, in Daniel 12:9 –

> "Go *your way,* Daniel, for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

Daniel wanted to know the details of what he had seen and heard, but he was told that the words were "closed up," meaning not open for viewing, and "sealed," meaning they were purposefully protected so that they could not even be accessed. The book in the Angel's hand however is fully open for any to read and discern.

John finishes the verse with the words from heaven stating that the book is "in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth." The Angel is certainly Christ Jesus. The word of the book is brought forth by Him, it is open, and it is in His hand, meaning within His authority. It is an authority that covers all of the earth (represented by His stance on the sea and on the earth).

John is now given the authority to take it from His hand. The symbolism given now comes directly from the book of Ezekiel where this is recorded –

> "Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book *was* in it. **10** Then He spread it before me; and *there was* writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it *were* lamentations and mourning and woe." Ezekiel 2:9, 10

The symbolism from Ezekiel will continue in the verses ahead.

Life application: The continued unfolding of the Lord's great plan of redemption includes the use of His people for specific tasks. Just as He used Ezekiel and John, so He can use you too.

When He stirs up your spirit to act, be ready to do so. He prompts us in various ways so that He may be glorified through our actions. It must be a delight to His heart for Him to see His creatures willfully following His call and directives.

And it is certainly the case that even small things done for the work of the Lord can have great impact. So, don't look at the big personalities within the church and think, "I wish I could be effective like him." Someone had to work his camera, or he wouldn't be in front of it. Someone else probably wrote his sermon. Without his sermon writer, he couldn't deliver it. And so on.

Every part makes up a whole, and no part is without its usefulness. In the body, there are fingers and hands, feet and toes, eyes and noses, and so on. But every part is a part accepted by JESUS!

Use us according to Your great plan, O Lord. We can know that You will never give us any task that is beyond our abilities because You created us and know our capabilities. Help us to know them as well and to use our time and talents in a manner that will bring You the most glory. You are surely worthy of all that we can do, so use us accordingly, O Lord. Amen.

So I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book."
And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth." Revelation 10:9

John was just told to take the little book that was open in the hand of the angel. In compliance with that directive, he says, "So I went." It is a compound word in the Greek beginning with the preposition *apo*, signifying away, or from. The imagery here is in the form of a vision, and so he "went away" to the angel, as if he is moving from one place to another. In this movement, he says to the angel, "Give me the book."

He complied with what he was told to do. The symbolism here seems to reflect what occurred in Isaiah 6. Isaiah had a vision of the Lord. During that vision, someone was needed to go forth and proclaim the Lord's words to Israel. With that in mind, it says –

> "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:
> 'Whom shall I send,
> And who will go for Us?'
> Then I said, 'Here *am* I! Send me.'" Isaiah 6:8

In Revelation, the Angel is standing there with this little open book in His hand, anticipating that someone will take it and proclaim its contents. John is instructed to take it and he complies with the instruction. In doing so, John says, "And he said to me, 'take and eat it.'" This is what happened to Ezekiel as well. Ezekiel saw a hand with a scroll in it. On the scroll were writings of lamentations, mourning, and woe. When he saw it, the account then says –

> **1** "Moreover He said to me, 'Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.' **2** So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll.
> **3** And He said to me, 'Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you.' So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness."
> -Ezekiel 3:1-3

Like Ezekiel, John is instructed to take the book and eat it. For Ezekiel, there was the effect of it filling his stomach, but first was the effect of it being like honey in sweetness. The taste of honey represents the sweetness of the word of God –

> "The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul;
> The testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple;
> **8** The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart;
> The commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes;
> **9** The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring forever;
> The judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether.
> **10** More to be desired *are they* than gold,
> Yea, than much fine gold;
> Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
> **11** Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
> *And* in keeping them *there is* great reward." Psalm 19:7-11

"How sweet are Your words to my taste,
Sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Psalm 119:103

For John, there are two effects to be realized. Quoting the words of the Angel, he says, "and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth."

Nothing is said of the bitter stomach in Ezekiel, but it is surely implied because the words on the scroll are of "lamentations, mourning, and woe." In other words, the taste of the word of God is sweet, but there is also the responsibility of conveying the word to others. It is a sobering and difficult responsibility. For Jeremiah, both effects can be seen. First, from Jeremiah 16 –

"Your words were found, and I ate them,
And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;
For I am called by Your name,
O LORD God of hosts." Jeremiah 15:16

However, Jeremiah also says –

"O LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded;
You are stronger than I, and have prevailed.
I am in derision daily;
Everyone mocks me.
8 For when I spoke, I cried out;
I shouted, 'Violence and plunder!'
Because the word of the LORD was made to me
A reproach and a derision daily.
9 Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him,
Nor speak anymore in His name.'
But *His word* was in my heart like a burning fire
Shut up in my bones;
I was weary of holding *it* back,
And I could not." Jeremiah 20:7-9

Jeremiah ate the words and they blessed him, but in conveying them to others, he found that the mission was painful and a burden. But he bore the commission and found himself unable to withhold the words he had eaten. John is being given a commission in his taking of the book. He too must proclaim the word, even if it makes his stomach bitter.

Life application: When we meditate on God's word, we can compare ourselves to what it says. In this, we find that God is infinitely greater than we are, and we can never compare to what His word proclaims – absolute holiness and complete purity. Because of this, it makes our stomach bitter, knowing our fallen state. And even more – when we share it with others, knowing that we are sharing God's truth, we can expect those who hear it will often shun us and revile us.

Many people want nothing to do with holiness and purity. They will accuse those who proclaim the word of being "holier than thou." And when we proclaim God's judgment for rejecting His word, the accusations and hatred only grow more intense.

The world is at war with God and His word, and this brings about bitterness and strife. But let us never compromise God's word for the sake of tolerance or non-confrontation. We are in a spiritual war and all wars contain bitterness, lamentation, and woe. But there is also great reward for those who proclaim the word, and for those who hear it and respond. That reward is JESUS!

Lord, fill us with Your word. Surely it is sweeter than honey to the mouth. In tasting its sweetness, may we never withhold its truth or diminish the lessons it teaches us, even though they can be hard to stomach, even causing bitterness of soul. And, Lord, give us the desire, stamina, and fortitude to stand fast on Your word and to proclaim it to the people of the world. It is a message the world simply cannot do without. Amen.

Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter.
Revelation 10:10

The order is the opposite of what the previous verse provided –

- it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.

- it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter.

The Angel knew the outcome of what John would experience and focused on the result. John, however, wrote the events as they occurred. Having noted this, John's words begin with, "Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it." It is the same thought, expressed in the previous verse, that was also earlier expressed by both Ezekiel and Jeremiah –

> "So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll." Ezekiel 3:2
>
> "Your words were found, and I ate them." Jeremiah 15:16

For John, it turned out just as the Angel said it would, "and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth." The Bible is a book of hope. It details the redemption of mankind, and it provides the gospel narrative. It tells us what God did in order to save us, and it tells us how to appropriate that salvation.

Further, Jesus really is coming back for His people. Because of these things, the Bible – the word of God – is a book of hope, wonderment, and joy. It is all revealed in what God has done, is doing, and will bring to completion for the people of the world. The messianic age will be marvelous to behold. And after that time, we have all of eternity to look forward to as well.

There will be no more pain or suffering. All things will be made new and we will walk in the light of the Lord. These things really will come to pass, and reading about them and conveying them to others is "as sweet as honey" to our souls. However, something else happened to John after eating the book. As he says, "But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter."

When we know something bad is coming in our lives, our stomachs churn and we have all kinds of physical problems associated with that. The bitterness we feel inside can only be resolved by passing through those times of trial and getting to the other side. This is the case with the message John has been tasked to convey, and it should be the case for each of us as we continue reading on in Revelation.

The world really will come to a time of decision, rejection of God, judgment, and destruction. How can the love of God be complete in our hearts when we know that each person who dies apart from Christ will be eternally separated from God and sent to a place of eternal torment? This should be a great and bitter thought of all for each of us. However, one thing we cannot do in the process is to waffle on our convictions.

<u>Life application:</u> Like Ezekiel of the past, we need to stand firm and proclaim God's word in its entirety –

> "But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel *are* impudent and hard-hearted. **8** Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. **9** Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do

not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they *are* a rebellious house." Ezekiel 3:7-9

John finished Chapter 9 with mournful words after the great battle that killed "a third of mankind" –

> "But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. **21** And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." Revelation 9:20, 21

The bitterness of conveying what the rejection of God means is something that John faced, and it is something we must face as well. Many will be lost because they have rejected the fount of true life. But some will be saved. Let us be sure to continue to tell what God has done. Let us continue to tell the precious gospel message concerning JESUS.

It is true Lord, the thought of your coming judgment is a difficult concept to stomach, especially when we understand Your mercy provided in the cross of Jesus. But it is this very cross that demands Your justice on all who reject the offer, the glorious offer, of grace and peace that was given there. Truly You are just when You judge, O God. Amen.

And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings." Revelation 10:11

John has taken the little open book and eaten it. It was, as anticipated, sweet as honey in his mouth, and it also made his stomach bitter. With that noted, John next says, "And he said to me."

Some Greek manuscripts say, "And they said to me." To justify "they" instead of "he," Greek scholars say it provides a sense of indefiniteness, such as "It was said to me." However, this doesn't follow naturally with the use of the word. If "he" is correct, it would be the Angel speaking to him. If "they" is correct, it would be both the Angel and the voice from heaven. This would be possible, even if both voices are that of Jesus. He is the One who was and who is and who is to come, and so it would be no different than the Lord speaking to Himself as is recorded in the 110th Psalm. This psalm is then cited in the New Testament by Jesus in the gospels (Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, and Luke 20:42) and in Acts 2:34. It is also cited in Hebrews 1:13.

Either way, the voice then says, “You must prophesy.” Here, the word “prophesy” should be considered in the broader sense of the word. Rather than speaking forth a future prophecy as in “Thus says the Lord, this will come about,” it is referring to speaking forth the word of God such as is described in Romans 12:6. In other words, John is being told he must communicate the contents of the little book, and he must do so, as it next says, “again.”

Albert Barnes is certainly correct in his analysis of this prophesying –

“The direct address is to John himself; but it is evidently not to be understood of him personally. He is represented as seeing the angel; as hearkening to his voice; as listening to the solemn oath which he took; as receiving and eating the volume; and then as prophesying to many people; but the reference is undoubtedly to the far-distant future.”

What Albert Barnes is saying, and which rightly conveys the intent, is that the word of Revelation that John is writing down (see Revelation 1:11) is what is being referred to. John, and the visions he is writing down, will be the basis for the “prophesying again.” As this is so, it means that prophesying has already been accomplished towards an intended audience and it went unheeded by that audience. As the prophecy of the Old Testament was directed toward Israel, it is Israel that must be “prophesied again” to with the words of John.

The contents of Revelation, from verse 4:1 until verse 19:10, are dealing with the tribulation period which is focused on the nation of Israel. As this is based on the seventieth week of Daniel’s “seventy sevens” of Daniel 9, it makes this a logical deduction. It would also explain the bitterness in John’s stomach as the recorded words are directed to his own nation who had rejected their Messiah. The prophesying that John is to do is not literally in person. Rather, it is speaking about the warnings and judgments which are revealed in Revelation. What he will receive and pen is what brings bitterness.

With that understood, the verse and the chapter end with, “about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.” Here the idea that this is directed toward Israel specifically comes clearly into focus. The word translated as “about” is *epi*. It is used in the dative case and it signifies “concerning.” Saying “about” is a good way of conveying the intent. As the Pulpit Commentary says –

“These are the objects of the prophecy, not the audience. This serves to explain the reference in the preceding sentence. The message is not delivered to, but about

peoples, etc. The fourfold enumeration seems to point to the breadth of the signification - it embraces the whole of mankind."

The question is, "Why would the message to be prophesied be 'about' all these categories instead of 'to' them?" The answer is because it is the Gentile nations who received and accepted the message of Christ for so long. At the same time, Israel had rejected it. This is found, for example, just before the close of the book of Acts –

> "So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. **24** And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. **25** So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, **26** saying,
> 'Go to this people and say:
> "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;
> And seeing you will see, and not perceive;
> **27** For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
> *Their* ears are hard of hearing,
> And their eyes they have closed,
> Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears,
> Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,
> So that I should heal them."'
> **28** "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" Acts 28:23-28

The Gentiles did hear (meaning respond to) the gospel. On the other hand, Israel rejected it and went into two thousand years of punishment. The message that must be "prophesied again" is to the people brought back from exile, and in the far-distant future from the time John received it. It will be especially proclaimed "in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel" as noted in verse 10:7.

<u>Life application:</u> The words of this verse appear to be correctly translated and evaluated above, but there are translations and evaluations that convey a different intent. Instead of prophesying about the people, nations, languages, and kings, it could very well mean "before" them. If this is the case, then these would be prophecies "against" them. In other words, they would stand as a witness against them. If so, what he will receive and pen for the world to see then is what brings bitterness to the whole world.

This idea, then, would be parallel to what Ezekiel was told in his vision and prophecy. Ezekiel 3:11 records –

> "And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse."

Ezekiel was prophesying *against* the rebellious house of Israel. John is either to prophesy a warning *against* the continued rebellious house of Israel, or against all of the people of the world. This secondary explanation is given as a reference, but – as noted above – this prophecy is more likely referring to the time of Daniel's seventieth seven and concerning Israel specifically, but without neglecting the Gentiles in the process.

The love and covenant faithfulness of God for His people has ensured that He has kept them and will keep them as a people. Someday they will acknowledge this and turn to Him in faith. And this great grace and mercy extends to any who will simply accept His offer of pardon and receive the gift of eternal life through the shed blood of His own precious Son, our Lord JESUS.

Lord, we as a species cannot seem to learn from the past, and we are thus destined to make the same mistakes again in the future. How sad it is that the people of the world cannot simply bow their knees and acknowledge You and Your great workings in human history. But such is not the case. We stubbornly turn our necks and turn from You. In this, You are surely justified when You judge. Before that day, give us the desire to continue to share the message of hope found in Jesus our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 11

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. Revelation 11:1

As Revelation is 22 chapters long, we are approaching the halfway point of the book. Chapter 11 begins another interlude between the sixth and seventh sounding of the trumpets, and the words of this opening verse trace a thought back to what is said in Daniel 9:27 –

> "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
> But in the middle of the week
> He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.
> And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
> Even until the consummation, which is determined,
> Is poured out on the desolate."

Without going through all the details, determining who the pronoun "he" is will define what one believes about the entire eschatological scenario of the Bible. If one incorrectly assumes it is Jesus, then what is being looked at now in Revelation will mean something entirely different to that person than to someone who rightly deduces that the "he" is referring to the antichrist.

The study is too long to include in a single line of Revelation commentary, but the details conveyed to Daniel refer to a seven-year period that is still future to us now. The details speak of Israel's time under the law, granted to them by the Lord in order for them to finally come into a right relationship with Him through the New Covenant.

In this coming time, a temple will be built. Israel will conduct temple rituals as prescribed by the law. In the middle of that "week," or seven-year period, the antichrist will end those sacrifices and offerings. Paul refers to how this will come about in 2 Thessalonians 2 –

> "Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, **4** who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."
>
> -2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4

The temple rites will be ended when the antichrist (called by Paul "the man of sin") proclaims himself God in the temple of God. It is an event future to us now, and the identity of this antichrist will be unknown to believers who will be taken at the rapture. Paul's words concerning the rapture, and the timing of these end times events, reveal this to be the case.

Understanding these things, John begins Chapter 11 with the words, "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod." In Chapter 9, the war was waged by a real air force and army that John described using terms he understood. It was something future to our time.

What John is seeing is something also future to us now. He is being given a reed that is intended to be used as a measuring rod. The measuring of something in the Bible is normally used to indicate either destruction of something, preservation of something, or a mixture of both. In the time of King David, in 2 Samuel 8, we read this –

> "After this it came to pass that David attacked the Philistines and subdued them. And David took Metheg Ammah from the hand of the Philistines.
> **2** Then he defeated Moab. Forcing them down to the ground, he measured them off with a line. With two lines he measured off those to be put to death, and with one full line those to be kept alive. So the Moabites became
> David's servants, *and* brought tribute." 2 Samuel 8:1, 2

The measuring rod was used in a prophecy in Ezekiel concerning the layout of a temple different than the temple Ezekiel knew during his time as a priest. That is seen in Ezekiel 40 –

> "In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain; on it toward the south *was* something like the structure of a city. **3** He took me there, and behold, *there was* a man whose appearance *was* like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway." Ezekiel 40:2, 3

The line of flax was used for longer measurements; the rod is for shorter ones. John is being given a rod for shorter measurements. After that, John says, "And the angel stood." These words are not found in many manuscripts and are considered spurious by some scholars. Assuming they are meant to be here, it is probably then an allusion to Zechariah 3:5 –

> "So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by."

If this is so, then the angel now being referred to by John is the Lord Jesus, just as it was in Chapter 10. Either way, John next says that this angel stood, "saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God.'" Scholars of the past assumed that this must be a symbolic measuring. This is because the dimensions of the actual temple were surely known, even if it had been destroyed by the time of John's writing out the book of Revelation.

In other words, they could not conceive of a future temple being built. Christ had come and fulfilled all of the symbolism of the temple and annulled the law in the giving of the New Covenant. But the thinking is in error. The Jews rejected Jesus and did not come under the New Covenant. Further, Daniel's timeline clearly indicates that the temple of the seventieth week must be a future temple, as confirmed by Paul's words of 2 Thessalonians. It is a literal temple that John is measuring, along with "the altar."

This would not be referring to the altar of incense which is within the walls of the temple. This is the altar of sacrifice located in the outer courtyard. It is the altar that Daniel implicitly refers to in Daniel 9:27 above when he said, "He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering."

In order to have "sacrifice and offering," there must be an altar for those things. John is directed to measure those things "and those who worship there." One does not measure "spiritual representations of worshippers." Rather, these are literal worshippers that are given an area of the courtyard to worship in, as was the case in past times, such as –

> "So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, **9** according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. **10** And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense." Luke 1:8-10

This is what John is being asked to measure. It is a real temple. It is future to us today. It will have an altar of sacrifice and an area for worshippers to come to. It will be on the temple mount, and it will be built based on a peace agreement that will be made between parties as brokered by the antichrist. As it says in Daniel 9 (above), "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week."

<u>Life application:</u> What is certain is that the temple John is asked to measure is not the temple that was destroyed in AD70. It is a temple that is yet future to our time. Amazingly, the implements for this temple are already made and are on display in Jerusalem. Its cornerstone has been anointed, and it is safely kept in Jerusalem, too. The

time for God's plan to be completed is coming, and we are participants and spectators in the great unfolding drama.

As the antichrist is the one who will broker the deal that will allow for this temple to be built, and as Paul says that we will not know who the antichrist will be, it is an implicit note to us that we are not to bother speculating on who he is. Rather, believers in the church today are to fix our eyes elsewhere. We are to fix our eyes on JESUS!

Lord, looking at the world today we can see that the end of the ages is not far off. Israel, the people, have been returned to their ancient homeland. The implements for temple worship have been made and are awaiting the temple's construction. And all of the associated tragedy with that happening is not far off. All because they missed their Messiah when He came. May many turn their hearts and minds to Him now before the terrible days of woe come. Amen.

But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot *for* forty-two months. Revelation 11:2

John was instructed to "measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there." Now, in this verse, he is told, "But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it." The word translated as "leave out" signifies to cast out. This means that the temple is considered acceptable and in accord with the allowances of Daniel 9:24-27, but the area outside of the temple is considered defiled and unholy. The measuring is what signifies the difference between the two. As it next says, "for it has been given to the Gentiles."

As incredible and impossible as it seems to many in today's world, there really will be another temple in Jerusalem. It will be built on the Temple Mount where the first and second temples stood. There is no need to argue this, God has already determined that it will come to pass, and He has prepared the people of Israel for this coming day. He has readied their hearts and they have readied the implements.

What seems like a likely scenario is that the battle described in Chapter 9, and quite possibly being the same battle as described in Ezekiel 38/39, will be the impetus for the building of this temple. After such an incredible victory, the nations will sue for peace with Israel, and a part of that peace deal will be the allowance for them to build this temple.

It may be that this temple will stand on a large empty spot directly in the middle of the mount. On the north end stands the Dome of the Rock, which is adorned with a gold dome. On the south end is the Al Aqsa Mosque. Or it may be where the Dome of the Rock is today, although that may continue to stand. Being dogmatic about that is unnecessary at this point.

The areas outside of the temple are obviously defiled areas that belong to the Gentiles. The measuring of this future temple leaves out the court where two defiled edifices stand, thus indicating that they are excluded from any blessing and will be removed at some point in the future. With this considered, the verse ends with, "And they will tread the holy city underfoot *for* forty-two months."

Of this time span, Vincent's Word Studies notes –

"A period which appears in three forms in Revelation: forty-two months (Revelation 13:5); twelve hundred and sixty days (Revelation 11:3, Revelation 12:6); a time, times and half a time, or three years and a half (Revelation 12:14, compare Daniel 7:25; Daniel 12:7)."

The Gentiles who have a foothold on the Temple Mount will also "tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." The term "underfoot" signifies that their very presence is a defiling act. They are unclean and what they tread on is defiled by them. Of the number forty-two, EW Bullinger says –

It "is a number connected with Antichrist. An important part of his career is to last for 42 months (Rev 11:2, 13:5), and thus this number is fixed upon him. Another number of Antichrist is 1260, and this is 30 x 42.
Its factors are *six* and *seven* (6x7=42), and this shows a connection between man and the Spirit of God, and between Christ and Antichrist:
Forty-two stages of Israel's wanderings mark their conflict with the will of God.
Forty-two young men* mocked the ascension of Elijah to Elisha, 2 Kings 2:23, 24.
Being a multiple of *seven*, it might be supposed that it would be connected with spiritual perfection. But it is the product of *six* times *seven. Six*, therefore, being the number of *Man*, and man's *opposition* to God, *forty-two* becomes significant of the working out of man's opposition to God."

The time period of forty-two months corresponds with Daniel 9:27 which says–

> "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
> But in the middle of the week

He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
Even until the consummation, which is determined,
Is poured out on the desolate."

A covenant of peace with the antichrist is coming, and it will be for a period of "one week" or seven years. However, this covenant will be broken in the middle of the week, which is three- and one-half years or forty-two months. Understanding and properly interpreting Daniel 9:24-27 is the key to understanding what is coming and when – and it all pertains to the Jewish people and to the city of Jerusalem. The book of Revelation is filling in details of what lies ahead that Daniel only saw in a broader outline.

But Paul also filled in some of the details. As he says in 2 Thessalonians 2 (and which was cited in the previous verse as well) –

> "Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, **4** who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."
>
> -2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4

Life application: The end times events being described in Revelation have been a constant source of worry and even fear for believers since they were written. But understanding Paul's words from 2 Thessalonians shows that this should not be so. When Paul refers to the falling away coming first and the man of sin being revealed, he is basing that on his words of 2 Thessalonians 2:2. There he refers to the "day of Christ."

But that is first based on what he says in verse 1, "concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him."

The tribulation period is also known as the Day of the Lord. Paul says that this day of the Lord (day of Christ – the terms are synonymous) will not come until AFTER the man of sin is revealed, and that will only come AFTER our gathering to Him. Each step is logical and orderly. If the antichrist (the man of sin) signs a seven-year covenant with Israel, which is Daniel's seventieth-seven, and that initiates the Day of the Lord (day of Christ), then why would we be looking for the antichrist? Rather, our eyes are to be set in anticipation of the coming of the Lord for us.

These time frames are important, and they are not to be dismissed. The Bible is carefully laying out the sequence of future events in order to give us hope, a great and blessed hope. It is the anticipation of our being gathered to JESUS!

O Lord, it is so exciting to see that we may be very close to the time that was prophesied so long ago in the book of Revelation, prophecies which reach back even to the time of the Old Testament prophets. As the world turns away from You, our hearts are longing for You all the more. We have a sure and blessed hope in the coming deliverance of Your people because of Jesus. Great is the promise and the hope that we possess. Thank You for this word of hope. Amen.

And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." Revelation 11:3

John is conveying the words of the Angel. He was instructed to measure the temple of God, but to omit the court outside the temple, noting that it had been given to the Gentiles. Now, the angel says, "And I will give power to my two witnesses."
The word "power" has been inserted. Based on the coming verses, that is possibly correct. However, it could also be "authority" or some other concept of appointment. Some translations simply leave the thought alone and say, "And will give to my two witnesses." Also, they are preceded by a definite article in the Greek –

"And I will grant to the two witnesses of me."

This then implies that they are known figures who serve the Lord. How they are known will come in the next verse.

Who these two witnesses are is as debated as anything else in the book of Revelation. Some see them as two people and the identification of them starts from that point. Some see them as representative of sets of twos, like when Jesus set apart his disciples to go forth two by two in Luke 10:1. Some think they are two institutions, such as two bodies of believers. Others see them as two general categories such as saved Jews and saved Gentiles, or the two testaments of Scripture.

As there are two, the meaning of the number should be explained. Two demonstrates that a difference exists. As E.W. Bullinger says, "We now come to the spiritual significance of the number Two. We have seen that One excludes all difference, and denotes that which is sovereign. But Two affirms that there is a difference—there is another; while One affirms that there is not another!"

Two is the minimum number given to bring charges against another as well. This is seen in the precept found in both testaments that says, “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1).

For this commentary, and without giving a defense against every one of the innumerable guesses as to who these two witnesses are, it is assumed based on their description that they are two people. These witnesses predate Christ’s first advent (as will be explained in the next verse), and they have a difference between them that fits what has already been revealed. In this, they are identified as Enoch and Elijah.

Some point to them as Moses and Elijah because they appeared to the Lord at the Mount of Transfiguration. This is incorrect for one obvious reason. They will be killed in verse 11:7. If they are two men, one cannot be Moses –

> “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”
> -Hebrews 9:27

Moses’ death is recorded already, and it excludes him from being one of these men. The arguments against this fail to adhere to this verse which states a firm and fixed precept. Further, the reason for Moses and Elijah’s appearance was one of symbolism. Bringing back Moses, who had already died, to appear on the Mount with Jesus was to make a theological point concerning His power over both the living (Elijah) and the dead (Moses). It also served to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah).

Some see the two as Elijah and John (the Apostle John). This is assumed because of the statement made by Jesus at the end of the Gospel of John –

> “Jesus said to him, ‘If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me.’” John 21:22

Such an interpretation is incorrect. Jesus never said John wouldn’t die. He was speaking to Peter about Peter. What was to happen to John had nothing to do with what would happen to Peter. Further, John does not precede the first advent of Christ in his ministry, something that is required for these witnesses. That will be put to rest with the analysis of the coming verse. Without defending against any other such claims, the two are more than probably Enoch and Elijah.

Only Enoch and Elijah are recorded as having been taken directly to heaven without dying. They were both taken before Christ’s first advent. Enoch was not a Hebrew

(Abraham is recorded as the first Hebrew), while Elijah was. Hebrew means "to cross over." This designation is important because of what has already been seen in measuring the temple but not the outer court. The temple is associated with the Hebrew people; the outer court is associated with Gentiles. The difference is seen in the sum of their testimony which is for all people. One testifies to the Hebrew people and the other to the Gentile people.

A clue of exactly this is found in Daniel 12 –

> "Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank. **6** And *one* said to the man clothed in linen,
> who *was* above the waters of the river, 'How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders *be?*'
> **7** Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who *was* above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by
> Him who lives forever, that *it shall be* for a time, times, and half *a time;* and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these *things* shall be finished." Daniel 12:5-7

Two men accompanied the Lord, who was above the waters. One is on one riverbank while the other is on the other riverbank. It is the same typology as seen above – one is a Hebrew; one is not. The word Hebrew means "to cross over." The symbolism is that one has crossed over the river and is a Hebrew. The Lord above the waters is Lord of both. Of these two, the verse continues with, "and they will prophesy."

The word can mean giving a testimony of repentance, sharing the gospel, predicting the future, and so on. It gives the idea of speaking out the inspired word of God as a witness. This is what they will be doing, and it will be for a period of "one thousand two hundred and sixty days."

This is the same as "forty-two months," or exactly three and one-half biblical years. A biblical year is three hundred and sixty days per. It signifies one-half of the tribulation period, meaning Daniel's seventieth seven. During this time, it says they will be "clothed in sackcloth."

The word is a transliteration from the Hebrew word *sak*. Wearing it is a sign of mourning and woe. Wearing such garments is to show great distress and humility before God. It is also as a petition that, even though destruction is deserved, there is a hope for mercy. In the case of these two, they are in sackcloth on behalf of the people they are speaking to. They are demonstrating that great woe is coming and that the people should take

heed and join them in their humble petitioning of God for mercy. Sackcloth is seen numerous times in the Old Testament in this manner. If the people they witness to fail to mourn over their sins and repent of their unholy lives, there will be consequences.

The three- and one-half-year period is not unique in the Bible. Elijah withheld the rains from Israel for this amount of time. This is testified to by both Jesus and James in the New Testament (Luke 4:25 and James 5:17).

Life application: This three- and one-half year period was prophesied by Daniel. It is pointing to a future date, not something that has already been fulfilled. The key to understanding the times we live in today is to understand Israel's role in prophetic events. Israel has been planted again in her land, never to be uprooted as the Lord has promised (see Amos 9:15).

The rebellion of Israel, and their being cast off from the Lord, is used by many scholars and theologians to justify the stand that the church has replaced Israel. This is a poor analysis of Scripture. It fails to take into consideration the unfailing nature of the Lord to His covenants. Israel's disobedience in no way negates the Lord's faithfulness. If the Lord could cut off Israel, He could also be unfaithful to His guarantee of redemption for those He has saved (see Ephesians 1:13, 14). Such can never be the case. We are dealing with the faithful Lord. We are dealing with JESUS.

Heavenly Father, the precise details of the future events revealed in Your word, including set time periods, tells us that there is a sure plan. It also reveals that there will be an end to the dispensation of grace that we now live in. And more, that the time is fixed and will not be changed. What You have ordained will come to pass, and all we can do is be in prayer that eyes will be opened and hearts will be responsive – to Your glory, O God. Amen.

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. Revelation 11:4

In the previous verse, the two witnesses were introduced. Two aspects of them were given that indicate they are actually men and not merely to be considered as metaphor: they prophesy and they are clothed in sackcloth. With that in mind, an evaluation of who they are was given, deciding upon (but not dogmatically barking out) Enoch and Elijah. Reasons for that were provided.

Moses was rejected as one and the explanation was given as to why. The apostle John was rejected as one. The reason was not fully explained. In this verse, it can be

determined why he is excluded. These two witnesses are now described by John. He says, “These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.” John is reaching back to what was said in the Old Testament. In Zechariah 4, the following is recorded –

> “Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. **2** And he said to me, ‘What do you see?’
> So I said, ‘I am looking, and there *is* a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the *stand* seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. **3** Two olive trees *are* by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.’ **4** So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, ‘What *are* these, my lord?’” Zechariah 4:1-4

Towards the end of the same chapter, it then says this –

> “Then I answered and said to him, ‘What *are* these two olive trees—at the right of the lampstand and at its left?’ **12** And I further answered and said to him,
> ‘What *are these* two olive branches that *drip* into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden *oil* drains?’
> **13** Then he answered me and said, ‘Do you not know what these *are?*’
> And I said, ‘No, my lord.’
> **14** So he said, ‘These *are* the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.’” Zechariah 4:11-14

These two anointed ones predate the time of the Apostle John. They have been serving the Lord since Old Testament times. As noted, the only two men who were taken directly to heaven in the Old Testament were Enoch and Elijah –

> “Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. **22** After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. **23** So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. **24** And Enoch walked with God; and he *was* not, for God took him.”
>
> -Genesis 5:21-24

> “Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” 2 Kings 2:11

The book of Hebrews repeats the note concerning Enoch’s translation ensuring that the few words concerning him could not be misconstrued –

> "By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, 'and was not found, because God had taken him'; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. **6** But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him,* for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Hebrews 11:5, 6

Jude goes on to note that Enoch was a prophet –

> "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, **15** to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.'" Jude 1:14, 15

Enoch is not a Hebrew; Elijah is a Hebrew (see the symbolism explained in the previous verse). Both were prophets. Both prophesied concerning the ungodliness surrounding them. These reasons indicate that the two most logical choices for the identification of the two witnesses are Enoch and Elijah. If they are humans, as seems more than probable, they meet the criteria that both Moses (whose death is recorded in Scripture) and John (who was not yet alive when Zechariah was written) do not meet.

An argument against this, which is invalid, is that it cannot be Enoch because he wasn't a Hebrew. This is faulty logic based on Paul's words of Romans 3:2 where he says that the oracles of God (meaning Scripture) were committed to the people of Israel. Two points dispel this thinking. Jude clearly identifies Enoch as a prophet, and Moses is the one who recorded the details of his life. Paul's words are simply a note that the people of Israel were those who maintained the oracles, not that non-Israelites could not prophesy. Job was not of Israel, and an entire book is recorded concerning him.

<u>Life application:</u> Both Enoch and Elijah never died. They have been faithfully serving the Lord for thousands of years now. There is no reason to think that they will not serve Him in this especially personal way during the coming tribulation period.

When evaluating difficult passages, it is often necessary to search the entire Bible to resolve the difficulties. We cannot run with biblical analysis without doing diligent research, and although passages like this one are not related directly to salvation, they are a part of the whole counsel of God and so they need to be treated as such.

Let us endeavor to do our best when evaluating Scripture. When our logic or interpretation is found wanting, let us step back, admit our error, and then move on in

what is logical and proper. To the glory of the Lord who gave us this marvelous word. To the glory of JESUS!

Lord, instill a desire in our hearts to know Your word completely – in both Testaments. Surely it is filled with treasure beyond our understanding, and the more we look into it, the more You will reward us in grasping it. May You alone be glorified through our studies and our teaching others of the wonders of Your Word! Amen.

And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner.
Revelation 11:5

This is referring to the two witnesses introduced in verse 11:3. It has already been established that their purpose is to prophesy. While prophesying, they are "clothed in sackcloth." As noted, this indicates a sign of mourning and woe. Wearing such garments is to show great distress and humility before God. It is also as a petition that even though destruction is deserved, there is a hope for mercy (see Jonah 3:5, e.g.). In the case of these two, they are in sackcloth on behalf of the people they are speaking to.

However, preaching a call to "repentance or judgment" – as is seen in Scripture and in the world today – is not a popular thing among those who revel in their wickedness. Because of this, there are those who will always fight against those who preach it. This will be the case with these two witnesses, and John next notes, "And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies."

The question here is, "Is this literal fire, or something else?" It is true that Elijah called down fire on those who came to him –

> "So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, 'If I *am* a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.'" 2 Kings 1:10

In this, Elijah called down fire, and fire from heaven consumed the men. However, this verse in Revelation says this fire came not from heaven, but from their mouths. Unless their breath is really bad, even explosive, it seems hard to imagine literal fire is what is spoken of here. Rather, the answer to the question appears to be resolved in the words of Jeremiah –

> "'*Is* not My word like a fire?' says the LORD,
> 'And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock in pieces?'" Jeremiah 23:29

And again –

> "They have lied about the LORD,
> And said, '*It is* not He.
> Neither will evil come upon us,
> Nor shall we see sword or famine.
> **13** And the prophets become wind,
> For the word *is* not in them.
> Thus shall it be done to them.'
> **14** Therefore thus says the LORD God of hosts:
> 'Because you speak this word,
> Behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire,
> And this people wood,
> And it shall devour them.'" Jeremiah 5:12-14

The word of the Lord, which is what these men are conveying through prophesying, is directly equated to fire. And the effects of the word of the Lord can then be equated to the effects of fire. For example –

> "For thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall see *it.* I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon and slay them with the sword. **5** Moreover I will deliver all the wealth of this city, all its produce, and all its precious things; all the treasures of the kings of Judah I will give into the hand of their enemies, who will plunder them, seize them, and carry them to Babylon. **6** And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity. You shall go to Babylon, and there you shall die, and be buried there, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied lies.'" Jeremiah 20:4-6

Also –

> "Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, 'Hear now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie. **16** Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will cast you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the LORD.'
> **17** So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month."
>
> -Jeremiah 28:15-17

Jeremiah also prophesied against groups of people, pronouncing upon them the judgment of the Lord. When the judgment was spoken forth, it was also accomplished. Therefore, there is no reason to not accept this "fire" spoken of in Revelation as a metaphor for the word of the Lord as spoken by these prophets. With this being the case, John then repeats the thought, saying, "And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner."

The repetition of the thought indicates the certainty of the matter. What is conveyed is certain, and it shall certainly come to pass. Those coming to harm these prophets are people with their own false testimony, and also naysayers who say that God isn't judging the world at all. They will come against these two in order to trap them in their own words, but Jesus has already given a promise to those who speak on His behalf in times such as this –

> "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. **12** For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."
>
> -Luke 12:11, 12

Because this is the case, the "fire" of the Holy Spirit's utterances is far more likely than real flames.

Life application: The words of the Lord are a consuming fire, particularly when they proclaim judgment. They burn away impurity, they refine those who are repentant, and they consume those who are not. In Isaiah, it says –

> "Heaven *is* My throne,
> And earth *is* My footstool.
> Where *is* the house that you will build Me?
> And where *is* the place of My rest?
> **2** For all those *things* My hand has made,
> And all those *things* exist,"
> Says the LORD.
> "But on this *one* will I look:
> On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit,
> And who trembles at My word." Isaiah 66:1, 2

When you read the word of God, do you tremble at what you read? Are you understanding this word is a word of judgment and condemnation, or a word of grace and life? The way that it comes to a person is based upon how they treat it. If the heart

is humble, it will lead to grace and life. If the heart is hard, it will judge and it will condemn. Be sure to accept the gospel as the saving grace it is presented as. Do not turn away from it! Instead, soften your heart and turn to God through JESUS!

Lord, just as Your words are a consuming fire when disregarded, they are also a fire in the hearts of those who love You. Let us never quench the fire that burns inside of us by withholding Your truth from others. Instead, give us the desire and ability to boldly proclaim Your truth to the people of the world. Amen.

These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. Revelation 11:6

John continues with the powers granted to the two witnesses. He begins this verse with, "These have the power to shut heaven." The heavens are above. To exercise power in the heavens implies the power of God. Thus, in exercising this power, it is a confirmation of the Source of their prophesying.

To shut up the heaven is then further described saying, "so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy." The Greek reads more descriptively, saying, "so that no rain shall wet." The implication is that even if there is rain in the sky, it will not wet the earth and provide relief from drought. This is the same power granted to Elijah. In 1 Kings 17:1, it says –

> "And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to
> Ahab, '*As* the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.'"

In this, it did not rain for three- and one-half years, as is testified to by both Jesus and James. Along with this power, it next says, "and they have power over waters to turn them to blood." This is the same power exercised by Moses –

> "Say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *buckets of* wood and *pitchers of* stone.'" Exodus 7:19

The idea of the waters being turned into blood here does not mean that it must be literal blood. The term can be metaphorically speaking of death in the water (from the Bible's statement that the life is in the blood), or some similar concept. The idea is that

these two witnesses have power over the waters to call on them to become blood, and thus undrinkable for the people.

Next, the verse continues with, "and to strike the earth with all plagues." The Greek actually reads in the singular – "with every plague." This then extends beyond the ten plagues of Moses to any plague also mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, or whatever other plague they decide upon that has not been mentioned before. They will have power, demonstrating their divine authority (and thus a confirmation that their message is from God), to strike the earth with every plague. And John notes this power is "as often as they desire."

From these words, it can be inferred that they are given full reign and authority to determine what plagues they will send forth. Unlike Moses who was given specific plagues to be performed at the word of the Lord, these witnesses can speak forth a variety of plagues to come about, and they come accordingly.

It should be considered that by noting these specific plagues, and the fact that several of them are close to what both Moses and Elijah did, it is asserted that this proves the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah. As one commentator notes, "Enoch doesn't meet any of those qualifications" (Ruckman). That is a simplistic and narrow evaluation of the matter.

The fact is that Moses did not do what Elijah did, and Elijah did not do things Moses did. Further, other prophets did things that neither of them did. Even the apostles spoke regarding authority to call down fire from the heavens (Luke 9:54). The idea that because no such miracle, sign, or wonder is recorded as being accomplished by Enoch – and so Enoch cannot be one of the two witnesses – is an argument from silence.

Enoch has already been noted as a prophet, and thus, he can be granted whatever power the Lord determines to give him in order to accomplish his witness. Moses does not qualify as one of the two witnesses because his death was recorded. As this is so, and as Hebrews clearly explains that man dies and then is judged, Moses is not one of the two witnesses. The two witnesses will die in the verses ahead. Whether the second witness is Enoch or not (and he is the most likely candidate based on the evidence presented), it is perfectly certain that neither is Moses.

<u>Life application:</u> The closing verses of the Old Testament says –

> "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
> Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

[6] And he will turn
The hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." Malachi 4:5, 6

This is a strong indication that Elijah is certainly one of the witnesses. Enoch is the most likely and biblically reasonable second witness. The power that these witnesses possess demonstrates that they are truly of God, and thus their message is from God. This is the purpose of granting such authority – confirmation of the Source.

However, throughout Scripture, men of God have had their words confirmed through such power, or through the fulfillment of their prophetic word, and yet people have rejected their message. How sad it is that the truth of God is presented to humanity, but it is ignored by those who see it!

And this is true with Scripture itself. It stands as a witness to the workings of God in the stream of time. It validates itself in countless ways, and it possesses true power to change. Despite this, it is ignored, belittled, and manipulated by the majority of the world. Let us not do any of these things. But rather, let us hold fast to this precious and sacred word, and let us carefully heed what it says, applying its contents to our lives in the context that is intended for us. It is this marvelous treasure, the Holy Bible, that tells us of God's saving grace as is revealed in the Person of JESUS!

Lord God, it is hard to understand how people can disregard Your word, despite all of the evidence in it which demonstrates that it is from You. It reveals You and Your plans to us, and it confirms itself through the prophetic word. And yet, it is rejected. Because of this, how much more just is Your judgment when it comes. Until that day, help us to continue to share the beautiful message of the gospel to others in anticipation of converting the lost to a saving relationship with You. Amen.

When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. Revelation 11:7

The two witnesses are being referred to here. They have a set mission to perform, and it will last a preordained amount of time. It is at the end of that time that John now says, "When they finish their testimony." In verse 11:3, the word *martysin*, or witnesses, was used. It is the noun that described them. They were witnesses to the people. Here, the word *marturia* speaks of the witness, or testimony itself. Once that is complete, John says, "the beast that ascends."

The Greek contains definite articles – "the beast the coming up." Thus, it is speaking of a particular beast. This may be a way of identifying, in advance, the beast mentioned in Revelation 13:1 and/or 17:8. This also may be a way of identifying the fourth beast of Daniel 7. John says that this beast that ascends "out of the bottomless pit will make war against them."

The two witnesses, regardless of who they are (this commentary has identified them probably as Enoch and Elijah but being future, this isn't certain), will finish their prophesying after three- and one-half years and they will be killed by this beast.

This is not likely to be the angel with the key to the bottomless pit in verse 9:1, but rather he is probably the leader of the forces that were let loose from there, represented by locusts. He is quite possibly the antichrist who was spoken of by Daniel and also by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10.

The term used for "beast" here is not the same term that is used for the four living creatures around the throne. Those are rightly translated as "living creatures." But because some translations use the term "beast" for both, it is good to clarify this. The term used here means a wild animal. It is probably analogous to the term used for a beast in Daniel chapter 7, but there is also a difference. The beast there is speaking of an empire, but this one in Revelation appears to be speaking of an individual. However, this isn't 100% certain either. This very well may be an empire too.

The leader of an empire is normally associated with the entire empire. When one speaks of the Germans of World War II, they will often speak of Hitler as representing the whole. Again, Stalin is used as an example of the entire communist system of his time. There is no reason to think this isn't the case here as well. Time will resolve these hard to identify terms, peoples, and empires. For now, John finishes with the words that this beast will "overcome them, and kill them."

Regardless as to who these witnesses are, this is an allowance of God. They have had the power to perform the miracles and wonders previously described, signifying that they are working on behalf of God who gave them the power. But the redemptive plan is set, the timeline is given, and these two witnesses are to die in the performance of their duties. This is by the allowance of God, and it is for His glory that it will occur.

<u>Life application:</u> God is in control of this and of every situation. After these things occur, we will see His omniscience in what comes about – knowing that He foresaw exactly what would happen. Whether this analysis is correct on who the two witnesses are or not, the world will be able to identify exactly what has come about as being what was

prophesied in the Bible. There will be no excuse for rejecting what is so clearly presented.

Death is not the end of the story for these two witnesses. Nor is it the end for any who belong to the Lord. He has complete and final control over all who are His. And so, whether by death or by rapture, we will be with the Lord forever. He prevailed over death so that we too will prevail over death. He is the Lamb that was slain but who rose again. He is JESUS!

Lord, by seeing the faithfulness of your prophets and witnesses who are described in the Bible, it can give us courage as well to speak out for Your glory and Your great name. Give us strength and boldness as we face the wickedness of this world, knowing that man can do nothing to us apart from Your will. Whether in life or in death, we are Yours. Nothing can change that. Thank You for this wonderful assurance. Amen.

And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Revelation 11:8

John now describes the treatment of the two witnesses after they have been killed, saying, "And their dead bodies will lie in the street." The Greek reads "upon the street." Their carcasses will be left exposed upon the street as a supposed testimony to the ending of their witness. They had prophesied of repentance or coming judgment, and there they will lie. As their dead bodies are left open and exposed in the streets of the city, these two are – in a sense – following their Lord in the public shame He endured.

Like Jesus, they have supposedly (stress the word) been defeated in "the great city." This is referring to the same spot that was mentioned in verse 11:1 –

> "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.'"

John was told to measure "the temple of God," meaning the temple of the Lord that will again stand on the temple mount in Jerusalem. It is in this location where the two witnesses had prophesied.

The term "great city" has not been used this way before when referring to Jerusalem, but it signifies the importance of the location in the end times. The world will look to it as a beacon of peace and unity, even while it flourishes in perversion and wickedness, something that has increased almost exponentially in recent years.

The Knesset, the seat of government in Israel, is located in western Jerusalem. There, the legalization of every type of indecency and perversion has come to pass, abortion is openly accepted as a legitimate practice, laws concerning the easing of restrictions on drug use are increasingly being introduced, and so on. These things will only increase in the time leading up to the coming of the two witnesses. Such things as this, and especially Israel's rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, will be highlighted by them. For this, they will be martyred and then their dead bodies will be left in the open street.

Because of these immoral practices by the people, John continues with descriptions of the city, saying, "which spiritually is called Sodom." The sin of Sodom is obvious. It is clearly defined in Scripture, and in whatever place the practice of homosexuality is openly accepted, that place will be labeled as Sodom – whether it is a bar, a district, a city, or a country. The label is fully understood as to what is being referred to.

Such practices are condoned and applauded throughout Israel today, and it all stems from the laws enacted in Jerusalem. Hence, it is the bearer of the title "Sodom." John continues with, "and Egypt." Egypt was the place of bondage, hardship, and oppressive rule from which Israel was redeemed by the Lord. Being brought out of Egypt was a picture of man's being brought out from bondage to sin. However, here John calls Jerusalem "Egypt."

Thus, he is indicating that it is a city in bondage to sin. The temple has changed nothing because by the law is the knowledge of sin. It can never lead to holiness. Instead, it can only heap up more guilt upon the people. The two witnesses will testify of freedom through the grace of God in Christ, but that will be rejected. The people will remain in their bondage.

Finally, and to ensure that the location of the city is not to be spiritualized away, John says of it, "where also our Lord was crucified." Jesus was crucified outside of the gates of Jerusalem. Today, that area is within the limits of Jerusalem. The note of the Lord's crucifixion is affixed to remind the reader that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law. All of the types and shadows of the Temple are found fulfilled in Him. And yet, instead of the Substance, they have chosen the shadow.

Further, the crucifixion of Christ points in two directions at once. It points to grace for those who accept it, and it points to judgment upon those who reject it. John's note calls out, "This really happened! The Lord of Creation came to this place and died for the sins of His people! Accept the grace of God in Christ or be judged by God in Christ!"

The words of John in this one verse were anticipated by the prophet Isaiah –

“Hear the word of the LORD,
You rulers of Sodom;
Give ear to the law of our God,
You people of Gomorrah:
11 “To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?”
Says the LORD.
“I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
And the fat of fed cattle.
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
Or of lambs or goats.
12 “When you come to appear before Me,
Who has required this from your hand,
To trample My courts?
13 Bring no more futile sacrifices;
Incense is an abomination to Me.
The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—
I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.
14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts
My soul hates;
They are a trouble to Me,
I am weary of bearing *them.*
15 When you spread out your hands,
I will hide My eyes from you;
Even though you make many prayers,
I will not hear.
Your hands are full of blood.
16 “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.
Cease to do evil,
17 Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Rebuke the oppressor;
Defend the fatherless,
Plead for the widow.
18 “Come now, and let us reason together,”
Says the LORD,
“Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.

[19] If you are willing and obedient,
You shall eat the good of the land;
[20] But if you refuse and rebel,
You shall be devoured by the sword";
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. Isaiah 1:10-20

Isaiah called the people of Judah Sodom and Gomorrah. He told them of the futility of their temple rites, and He spoke of their receiving the grace and cleansing from sins that can only come from a heart directed to the Lord. What Isaiah laid out at the beginning of his book, John sums up in a single sentence in Revelation.

Life application: These names and descriptions for Jerusalem are given, but they could have been avoided – simply by heeding the call of the two witnesses. But by rejecting their words, the same thing will come upon them as came upon both Sodom and Egypt – great punishment and judgment.

The same is true with the world today. We have two great witnesses already – the two testaments of Scripture. They stand together as a unified body of writing that witnesses to God's working out the redemptive narrative for fallen man. It is this marvelous book, the Holy Bible, that calls out to us to turn to God and receive His offer of pardon, restoration, and forgiveness. This book calls out for us to turn to JESUS.

O Lord, even in the face of the great plan of redemption for us that You have so carefully laid out in the pages of Scripture, the people of the world have rejected its testimony. Thus, they have rejected You. We have Your complete revelation in the pages of the Bible and yet most people ignore it, shun it, and openly revile against it. Lord, open hearts and minds to the precious truth of Your word – the word that tells us of Your loving grace, given through Jesus. Amen.

Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves.
Revelation 11:9

The previous verse noted that the dead bodies of the two witnesses will lie in the street of the great city (certainly speaking of Jerusalem). Now John says, "Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations." This is an all-encompassing thought that could be spiritualized, but today there is no need to do so. In the past, such a thought could be conveyed as well, as a message went out from one nation to another by courier, but that would take an extraordinary amount of time.

However, a long amount of time is not available with what this verse next conveys. John says that these many categories "will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days." At the time of John, seeing something meant within the distance of the human eye, or maybe as a depiction in a drawing. However, John's words clearly convey that people from all over the world would be able to see these dead bodies all at once, and for a period of three-and-a-half days.

Unless this timeframe is somehow spiritualized, it would be impossible to think this could happen at John's time, or at any time up to the present generation. And yet, with the advent of the internet, smart phones, live-streaming, and so on, this is not only possible, but it is what one would naturally expect for a such an event. Something like "The Two Witnesses" live webcam could have been broadcasting during the entire time of the witnessing. Upon their deaths, it would continue to run. With these two "enemies" of the state now dead, John says that the people of the world will "not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves."

In the Middle East, as elsewhere in hot sunny climates (assuming it is the warm time of the year), it is important to bury bodies quickly due to the effects of decay. However, the world will be happy to have these men lie open and exposed as they rejoice in their perceived triumph over them and over the message they proclaimed. As they claimed they were speaking on behalf of the Lord, the thought will be that of triumph over Him.

The words of this verse show a world filled with wickedness, as they jointly deny these two the respect of burial.

Life application: This verse does not prove John was referring to modern technology, such as TV, live-streaming, and so on. However, it does suggest it. Because these things are now a normal part of everyday society, it is easy to see how what John relays to us certainly matches the world as it now is.

Those who deny that Revelation is written for our time might say that the categories of people mentioned in this verse were simply pilgrims to Jerusalem and were thus representative of the known world at the time. However, it is no longer necessary to look at the events in such a manner. The description of the armies in Chapter 9 clearly point to modern armies. As this is certain, there is no reason to take what is stated in these verses as anything but literal as well. They exactingly match what is now possible in the world today.

As this is so, it shows that we are probably very near to the time in which these events will come about. That, in turn, tells us that we are even nearer to the coming of the rapture. Each day draws us nearer to the day we will be called home to be with JESUS!

Lord God, we surely live during exciting times. It is wonderful to think of the blessing of living in this age and seeing the things that people of the past could not have even imagined. And yet, we also now face new types of trials and frustrations unknown to those of the past. Our lives are hurried, and our days are overloaded. Help us to focus on what is most important, which is our relationship with You. Help us to not be distracted from that! Amen.

And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Revelation 11:10

The previous verses noted the killing of the two witnesses. It then mentioned that they were left in the street for three- and one-half days with the whole world able to see it. From there, John says, "And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry." The verbs are actually in the present tense in order to make the scene more graphic – "And those who dwell on the earth rejoice over them and make merry."

John is describing the future in his words as if it is happening as he writes. It is understood that when someone's foes are defeated, there is a sense of elation. In the case of these two witnesses, they were the enemy because the world hated the convicting message they spoke out. With that testimony ended, the world at large goes into a party of jubilation. Along with that, John says they will "send gifts to one another."

The verb here is in the future tense, "and will send gifts to one another." The change from the present to the future tense seems to convey a sense of revulsion by John – "They do this and this and then they will even do this."

The sending of gifts is a middle eastern way of showing elation. For example, it is found in Nehemiah 8:10 –

> "Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day *is* holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'"

It is also seen in Esther 9 when the Jews gained victory over their own enemies –

> "But the Jews who *were* at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth *day,* as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth of *the month* they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. **19** Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwalled towns celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar *with* gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another." Esther 9:18, 19

Likewise, when the world thinks it has gained the final victory, they will send gifts "because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth."

The word translated as "tormented" signifies to examine by torture. It can be literal or figuratively applied. The sense here is the same as in 2 Peter 2:8 where it speaks of Lot's righteous soul being tormented by the wicked conduct around him. Where wickedness dwells, the soul of the righteous is tormented. And where righteousness is proclaimed, the souls of the wicked are tormented. This is the sense of what is being conveyed now. The earth wants to follow its own perverse path, but the call out – by the two witnesses – brings about unwanted conviction.

Life application: In John 16:20, Jesus said to his disciples – "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." The world rejoices when it seems that God's plans are thwarted or defeated. It has always been this way, and it will continue on during the tribulation period. But what the world does not stop to consider: God is God, and He is above His creation. He knows what will occur – from beginning to end.

What may seem to be a defeat to us may still be a part of His plan. If so, it comes about because He determines it to be that way. This is a trick people. Instead, it is proof of His sovereignty over what happens. This is because He will tell, in advance, concerning what and how things will happen. When those things come about, we can then know that it was because He directed the events. Such is true with the entire redemptive narrative. God promised He would restore man to paradise, and He shall do so. And that promise is centered on the giving of His Son. The promise is fulfilled through our Lord JESUS.

Heavenly Father, it truly is heartbreaking to stand back and see people rejoice over deeds of evil and wickedness. There is a sense that there is no control at all left in the world. However, we know there is, and we know that it is found in You. Help us to change hearts and minds through the gospel of Jesus before judgment falls and it is too late for these wayward souls. Amen.

Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Revelation 11:11

In the previous verse, John noted that those who dwell on the earth rejoiced over the death of the two witnesses. However, he now says, "Now after the three- and one-half days the breath of life from God entered them."

The world saw and heard the witness, the prophecy, and the miraculous signs, wonders, and plagues of the two witnesses. However, they disregarded them, fought against them, and eventually killed them. After this, they shamelessly let them lie dead in the streets of Jerusalem for three- and one-half days. The bodies will certainly be in a state of decay and, knowing the way things are handled at such times, people will also probably abuse the dead bodies as well. However, their shameless conduct, along with their gloating, parties, and celebrations, will be short-lived. After this period, the "breath of life from God" will enter them.

If these two witnesses are Enoch and Elijah, meaning real people and not something being spoken of in metaphor, it seems incredible to even imagine. However, such an event is not without biblical precedent –

> Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and
> a stone lay against it. **39** Jesus said, "Take away the stone."
> Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a
> stench, for he has been *dead* four days."
> **40** Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see
> the glory of God?" **41** Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the
> dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, "Father, I thank You
> that You have heard Me. **42** And I know that You always hear Me, but because of
> the people who are standing by I said *this,* that they may believe that You sent
> Me." **43** Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus,
> come forth!" **44** And he who had died came out bound hand and foot
> with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to
> them, "Loose him, and let him go." John 11:38-44

Lazarus really was dead for four days, and yet he was raised to life. From a biblical perspective, there is nothing impossible about the event now being conveyed in Revelation. This is because the God of the Bible is the Creator of all things. In His hand is the power to give life and to restore life. As for the two witnesses, it next says, "and they stood on their feet."

The wording here carefully and precisely follows that which is recorded in Ezekiel 37 –

> Also He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.”’” **10** So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. Ezekiel 37:9, 10

First, the breath of life entered the nation, and then they stood upon their feet. Because of the symbolism, it is quite clear that the two accounts are being tied together for Israel to make the connection. Just as Israel was raised to life, became a nation again, and stands upon its feet, so have these two witnesses.

In fact, the death and resurrection of these two witnesses are to be considered the most powerful part of their mission for the evangelization of Israel. If they can see that the same Lord, who reestablished them as a nation, is also the Lord Jesus who these witnesses proclaimed, they will finally come to the point of calling out to Him. So incredible, however, will this event be that John finishes with, “and great fear fell on those who saw them.”

Again, whether two actual people or something else which is spoken of in metaphor, the event will be incredible. In viewing this, the whole world will fear greatly. It will be a clear indication that the God who was proclaimed by these two witnesses is, in fact, fully capable of doing anything. The assumed victory will be short-lived. This revivification of life will be the sign of their sure to come judgment.

Life application: The term “breath” and “spirit” are, at times, used synonymously in the Bible. They come from the same word in both the Hebrew and the Greek languages. The breath referred to here is surely the same breath mentioned at the creation of man in Genesis 2:7, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” These two are given the reanimation of their bodies. The “breath of life from God” surely includes the fact that they are born of the Spirit.

Their resurrection then is an eternal one. They have triumphed over death because Jesus went before them and has granted them the same eternal life that He has. This is an implicit indication that the rapture has already occurred. These two witnesses, Enoch and Elijah, were taken to serve the Lord in Old Testament times and returned to earth to witness. These two came as witnesses to the fact that it is in Jesus Christ alone that true life is found. Their death and resurrection will testify to this.

Paul explains in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 that "the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord." These two are resurrected, demonstrating that the rapture is something that really happened, and the great delusion spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2 was exactly that. People will be convinced that a "rapture" never happened somehow. This will be proven false by the resurrection of the two witnesses.

All of this may seem incredible, or even impossible from our earthly perspective, but it is what the Bible proclaims. Enoch and Elijah were taken by the Lord in the past, Lazarus was raised, and we too shall be raised to eternal life and raptured to eternal glory. The two witnesses will testify of the truth of God in Christ, they will die, and they will be resurrected. All of this is possible because we serve the Living God. We serve JESUS!

Thank You Lord for the great hope we as believers in Christ Jesus possess – the promise of eternal life through the resurrection of the dead! Why should we fear when we know that Jesus has already triumphed over death for us? We need never fear; our hope is secure in You! Hallelujah and Amen.

And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. Revelation 11:12

The two witnesses that were killed were brought back to life in the previous verse. There, it said that the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet. John now continues with the amazing words concerning them, saying, "And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them."

A voice from heaven was last noted (twice) in Chapter 10. It now calls out again, this time directly to the two witnesses. One reason for taking these two witnesses as literal humans is this statement. If they are simply being used as metaphors of something not alive, it would be rather hard to understand why a voice is calling out to them.

It is true that they could be metaphors for categories of people, like Jews and Gentiles within the church, but that would mean that all of the believers on the planet would have been killed and left in the streets of Jerusalem for three- and one-half days. Such analyses are quickly found to be wanting. It is probably best to accept these as two literal people who have served the Lord all along (see comments on verse 11:4) and who are now being called out to after their deaths. With this thought in mind, the words of the voice are recorded, saying, "Come up here."

In Revelation 4:1, this was recorded –

> "After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.'"

As was seen, and which follows the carefully detailed timeline of Scripture, that was a picture of the rapture of the church. From chapters 1-3 the church was addressed, but after 4:1 – all the way up to chapter 19 – the church is never mentioned again. The world, however, was deceived into believing that no such thing as the rapture occurred. Paul explained in 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12 that this deception would happen. The people of the world will be blinded to the truth of the rapture, and they will accept some cunningly crafted story instead.

But when these two witnesses are brought back to life, there will be no doubt about what they have seen. In the same call as the church received, "Come up here," they will be gathered to the Lord. And it will be in a similar fashion to the rapture as well, just as Paul explains –

> "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. **16** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

The comparison to the rapture as is being described by John now is purposeful. He continues saying, "And they ascended to heaven in a cloud." Believers in Christ will be gathered to the Lord in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:50-52). It will be an immediate change from a state of death (Paul calls it "sleep") for those who have passed, or a change from this earthly life to a new and eternal life for those who are still alive at the Lord's coming. This will be so sudden and abrupt that it will allow for the great delusion to occur. However, the words of Scripture testify of the event. When the two witnesses are raised to life and taken to heaven, it will be a witness that such things are possible and that those who failed to believe after the rapture were without excuse. With the ascension of these two witnesses, the end will come. The timeline is referred to by Paul –

> "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. **24** Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power."
>
> -1 Corinthians 15:23, 24

This is the general order of things. Christ was raised. Christ will come for His church. The end will come. Paul was giving an overall summary of the timeline, not every detail. The ascension of the two witnesses comes three- and one-half years after the rapture of the church. The way it occurs here in Revelation 11 does not match Paul's description in 1 Corinthians or 1 Thessalonians.

The ascension of the two witnesses is the conclusion of the matter though, because after that occurs, the time of the end will be at hand. Again, Paul's words form an overall summary that is supplemented with greater detail elsewhere, both in his words and those of John in Revelation. With this understood, the verse closes out with, "and their enemies saw them."

Unlike the rapture, which will be instantaneous, this is a visible event. Such events are recorded in Scripture to stand as a witness to the fact that it truly occurred, and those who beheld it could be confident of what they saw. It happened at the taking of Elijah in 2 Kings 2, it happened at the ascension of the Angel of the Lord in Judges 13, and so forth. It also happened in Acts 1 at the ascension of the Lord Jesus. Interestingly, it is probable that these two witnesses who are now being called to heaven after their resurrection were there at that time (meaning Enoch and Elijah) –

> "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. **10** And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, **11** who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.'" Acts 1:9-11

The raising and ascension of these two witnesses is not a picture of the rapture of the church. Instead, it is a sign to the people of the world that the words of Scripture concerning the rapture of the church were true. Rather than believing the word of God, most will have believed the lie.

<u>Life application:</u> These two men, most probably Enoch and Elijah, were taken directly to heaven to serve the Lord for the past thousands of years. If so, they were there with Him in the Old Testament, they were probably the two with Him at His ascension, and

they will testify concerning Him at the end of the present age. Eventually, they too will be taken up in a cloud just as their Lord was. Imagine the stories these two men have concerning their service to the Lord!

But imagine the stories you too can have, right now, for the service of the Lord. The results of your judgment for rewards and loss at the Bema Seat of Christ is totally up to you. As long as you are alive, you still have a chance to do GREAT THINGS for the Lord. What may seem like a small thing can have immense effects.

If you give to a church or missionary, they may – in turn – bring many to Christ, build up and train believers, and so on. If you pray for the lost, your prayers may be responded to in a manner that will bring about the event that brings them to Christ. Doing something great for the Lord may involve helping out with the writing or editing of commentaries or sermons for your pastor. It may be that you can help with uploading sermons to the internet. Each of these things may seem insignificant, but the results of them may be enormous.

And remember that each and everything you do should be with one overall purpose – to reveal to a lost and dying world the majesty of the Lord, our Lord, JESUS!

Lord, the way you have tied things together in Scripture is simply astonishing. The small clues you have placed throughout the pages of Your word lead to immensely interesting patterns and parallels. They also testify to Your faithfulness to Your people. When the world is judged, Your people have nothing to fear. At the same time, the world at large will have no excuses. Hallelujah! Thank You, O Lord. Amen.

In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. Revelation 11:13

In the previous verse, the two witnesses ascended to heaven in a cloud. With that event complete, it now says, "In the same hour there was a great earthquake." The Greek reads, "In the hour there was…" It is a way of showing that the two events are connected and not merely coincidence. It is the same thought that is conveyed in Matthew at Christ's death –

> "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.
> **51** Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split." Matthew 27:50, 51

And again, at Christ's resurrection –

> "And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it."
> -Matthew 28:2

The earthquakes coinciding with such major events are to alert those who experience them that they are more than chance events, they are perfectly timed events to confirm they are of God. With the coming of the earthquake, it then says, "and a tenth of the city fell." Of the number ten, EW Bullinger states –

"It has been already pointed out that ten is one of the perfect numbers, and signifies the perfection of Divine order, commencing, as it does, an altogether new series of numbers. The first decade is the representative of the whole numeral system, and originates the system of calculation called 'decimals,' because the whole system of numeration consists of so many tens, of which the first is a type of the whole. Completeness of order, marking the entire round of anything, is, therefore, the ever-present signification of the number ten. It implies that nothing is wanting; that the number and order are perfect; that the whole cycle is complete."

As Bullinger notes, "the first decade is the representative of the whole numeral system." In a tenth of the city falling, it is revealing that the whole is judged. An example of a tenth representing the whole is the Old Covenant system of tithing. The first tenth is representative of the whole. The idea here is the "judgment has come upon the whole." With that understood, John next says, "In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed."

The Greek reads, "names of men." It is a way of positively identifying those of a set number rather than a rounded number. It is the same number that was claimed by the Lord at the time of Elijah. In 1 Kings 19:18, the Lord said to him, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." Surprisingly, a liberal newspaper in Israel, Ha'Aretz, reported in 2018 that this exact number is anticipated to die in a major earthquake. The title of the article says, "Minister: Major Earthquake in Israel Could Kill 7,000."

It should be noted that it says a tenth of the city was destroyed, but it doesn't say that seven thousand is a tenth of the people. The facts stand alone, but they are connected by the event. The number seven is the number of spiritual perfection. Thus, whether seven thousand are reserved by the Lord (as in the days of Elijah), or seven thousand are killed at the time of the earthquake, it is a spiritually perfect claim by God on the whole.

Because of what occurs, John then says, “and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.”

The meaning of this is that they recognized God’s hand in what has occurred and acknowledged it as such. It cannot mean that all of them will turn to God and believe unto salvation. Later in Revelation, it will explicitly say that any who take the mark of the beast cannot be saved (vs. 20:4). For any who take the mark, there can only be condemnation. For those who do not, they can turn to God through belief in Christ and be saved.

Life application: God has given His word to us to lead us back to Himself. However, many carelessly fail to pick it up and read it. However, He will also work through natural events to wake people up by His judgments. Tragedy, in one form or another, has a way of causing people to seek out God and have a proper relationship with Him. If this results in a person turning his heart to the Lord, then the tragedy was worth it. In the end, no tragedy is worse than dying apart from God’s one and only means of restoration with Him. And that means is through His Mediator, our Lord JESUS.

Lord God, we in the world find every reason to ignore you and Your obvious call to us through the written testimony in Your word. Therefore, judgment is often the only remedy. Because this is so, and because it will bring You glory, let Your judgment come so that You may receive what we have otherwise failed to give. Amen.

The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. Revelation 11:14

With the ascension of the two witnesses, followed by the great earthquake in Jerusalem, John now says, “The second woe is past.” With the first two woes complete, there is one more to come. The world has not woken up from the spiritual darkness they are in. Because of this, there will be more judgment before the tribulation period is over. With that understood, John next says, “Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”

When it says “quickly,” it doesn’t necessarily mean “immediately.” It means that when it comes, it will be sudden and abrupt. In the Revelation narrative, there is going to be a lengthy delay in the sequence of judgments. The next set, the bowl judgments, will not be introduced until Chapter 15, and they will not be poured out until Chapter 16. In the meantime, there will be more interludes to analyze.

Life application: Looking over commentaries of the past, there is an amazing diversity of opinion about the meaning of the events that are given in Revelation. Depending on one’s view of Scripture and the role of the church in history, some have seen all these

events directed at the Jewish nation culminating in the destruction of the temple in AD70 (preterism). In this view, prophecy is complete. Other than the return of Jesus, the church is the center of all attention throughout history. Others take that a step further and say that all prophecy is complete, even including the return of Jesus (hyper preterism – a heresy).

Some see these events and their resulting judgments directed at the Roman Catholic Church and/or other historical figures as the narrative unfolds in history. Subsects and cults have invariably inserted themselves into the narrative, claiming they are the center of the presentation. Within these views, there are innumerable varied interpretations as well.

However, and has been clearly seen, these events are future, not fulfilled in the past or progressively unfolding in history. Israel of the future is the key to understanding coming prophecy. Unfortunately, for most of the church age, it was assumed that the church had replaced Israel (replacement theology) and that it alone was to be the center of prophecy.

Why would this be the case? The answer is that the Old Testament makes innumerable prophecies that had not been fulfilled. These were directed to Israel, and yet Israel was destroyed, and the people were scattered all over the world. It could not be conceived by the church that Israel would ever again hold a notable position within the world. Because of this, the church assumed that the unfulfilled prophecies were to be spiritually fulfilled in the church.

In Romans 11, Paul speaks of blindness coming upon Israel (meaning blindness toward who Jesus is) until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. What the church has failed to see is that this time of blindness in Israel has been matched with its own time of blindness toward Israel. With Israel regathered, and with the nations lining up in the exact manner that the Old Testament prophecies revealed, it has become clear that replacement theology is simply incorrect.

The Lord has remained faithful to Israel despite Israel's unfaithfulness to Him. The promises and prophecies will be fulfilled. Israel will receive her Messiah, and He will return to them after the woes of Revelation are complete. He will never let a word of His word fail because He is JESUS!

O God, thank You for allowing us to peer into your word and discover the riches of Your unfolding plan. In recent history, we have seen that it does include the faithful keeping of Your covenant with Israel. After a seemingly endless dispersion, they are back where You

promised they would be, and the church is in the state Your word says it would be in these final days. Your word is trustworthy and sure. Now, we await the culmination of the ages and the return of Jesus. May that day be soon! Amen.

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" Revelation 11:15

The last verse mentions that the second woe, which came at the blowing of the sixth trumpet, was past. It then said that the third woe is coming quickly. Now it says, "Then the seventh angel sounded." This means the third and final woe is to be ushered in. That was noted in verse 8:13 –

> "And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!'"

As noted in the previous verse, however, the word "quickly" does not necessarily mean "immediately." In relation to the biblical narrative, there is an extended set of interludes before the pouring out of the bowl judgments. To open up those various scenes, John next says, "And there were loud voices in heaven."

This is the exact opposite of the loosing of the seventh seal. At that time, it said, "there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." What is interesting is that the seventh trumpet is a trumpet of woe and of judgment on earth, and yet for now there is silence. On the other hand, the voices in heaven resound.

We are not told whose voices are heard, but it is possible that they are the voices of the four living creatures. This is because in verses 4:9 & 10 it says, "Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne…"

The response to the voices now heard will be recorded in the coming verse. Whoever's voices they are, John records them as "saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ.'"

Here, manuscripts vary saying either "kingdom" or "kingdoms." If the singular is correct, it would mean that the kingdom of Satan that held sway over the entire world has now moved to the authority of Jesus. If the plural, it would be referring to the many

dominions of the world now falling under the authority of the Lord. Either way, the sense of total rule and spiritual dominion has moved to that of Jesus.

Saying "our Lord" speaks of the ownership rights of Jesus. He is the master of all. Saying "and of His Christ" refers to the anointed status of Jesus as the rightful Heir. The term, "the Lord's Christ," was used to indicate this in Luke 2:26. This follows on from the Old Testament term, "the Lord's Anointed," and it gives the sense of what is now conveyed. For example, Psalm 2 says –

> "The kings of the earth set themselves,
> And the rulers take counsel together,
> Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying,*
> **3** 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces
> And cast away Their cords from us.'" Psalm 2:2, 3

The idea is also conveyed in Psalm 110 –

> "The LORD said to my Lord,
> 'Sit at My right hand,
> Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" Psalm 110:1

Jesus is "His Anointed" and He is the "Lord." John's words assure the reader that Jesus has reclaimed full authority over what was lost at the fall, "and He shall reign forever and ever!" The term "forever and ever" is from the Greek phrase "to the ages of the ages." It reflects eternity itself and is something that has no end. The authority of Christ over the earth is complete, absolute, and eternal. What was lost will never be lost again.

Life application: What might seem confusing is that this cry is recorded before the third woe. In other words, there is still rebellion, judgment, and destruction to be described. However, this is an anticipatory recording of the trumpet, and it includes the seven bowl judgments. It encompasses what is yet ahead. This was seen in the commentary of Revelation 10:7, where it said, "The timing of the sounding of the seventh trumpet completes the set of events that occur. It does not initiate them. It is during this period that 'the mystery of God would be finished.'"

Remembering what just occurred concerning the resurrection of the two witnesses, there can be no doubt about God's promises or about the truth of His word at this point, and so before the bowl judgments come, the proclamation is made.

Also, the seventh trumpet here is not the "last trumpet" Paul refers to when speaking about the rapture. That trumpet was a trumpet of the church age and was one of salvation. This trumpet is during the Tribulation period and is one of woe and more coming judgment. However, despite the coming trials, the victory is assured.

Each part of the unfolding narrative tells us that God has a plan, that it is being worked out, and that it cannot be thwarted. Things are stated as a certainty at various points in redemptive history because those things are certain. For example, Paul tells believers in Ephesians 2:6 that God "raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus."

In other words, even though we are still in the world, living out our earthly lives, in God's mind, we are already raised up and seated in the heavenly places. This is the note that is conveyed concerning the certainty of Christ's position that is found in this verse of Revelation. The thing is accomplished, and the victory is won. The Lord's Christ shall reign forever and ever because He is JESUS!

Victory belongs to our Lord. His kingdom will reign on earth forever and ever. But how wonderful it is to know that, even now, we can participate in that glorious kingdom! Oh God, You have offered peace and reconciliation to the people of the world through the shed blood of Jesus. Thank You, O God, for the victory of our Lord over the cross of Calvary! Hallelujah and Amen.

And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, Revelation 11:16

In the previous verse, it was noted that "there were loud voices in heaven." The source of those voices was not stated, but it was surmised that they were possibly the voices of the four living creatures around the throne. The reason for assuming this was found in verses 4:9 & 10, which state, "Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne."

That exact reaction of the elders is now stated in this verse, saying, "And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God." This may be in response to the voices of the four living creatures giving "glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever."

What these elders will say comes in the next two verses, but before citing those words, it would be good to review what they said in the same such instances from chapters 4 & 5 –

> Rev 4:11 – "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."
>
> Rev 5:9, 10 – "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

As is noted, the first time they fell before the Lord in praise it was based on the Lord's creative power – "For You created all things and by your will they exist and were created." The next time their phrase was based on Jesus' act of redemption – "For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood." These things have followed a pattern. Such will be the case with their coming words as well. Before analyzing those coming words, what do you think will be the reason these twenty-four elders fall down before the Lord in the coming verses? Stay tuned and we will analyze them together.

Life application: Paying attention to the terminology of phases, such as the utterances of the twenty-four elders will help you see and understand the plan of God unfolding before your eyes. Everything in Scripture is connected, and so it is good to step back and look at the word from a wide-angle lens, and then focus on the details as well. Neglecting one aspect or another will cause you to miss some of the marvelous intricacies of the word. So keep studying! Keep reading! Keep meditating on this precious word. It contains words of life because it speaks of JESUS!

What a wonderful and beautifully unfolding plan You have laid out in the pages of Your word! Thank You for opening up these passages for us and showing us the great heavenly scenes which even the angels participate in! How blessed we are when we simply open Your word and look at its structure and beauty! Thank You, O Lord, Amen.

saying:
"We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty,
The One who is and who was and who is to come,
Because You have taken Your great power and reigned. Revelation 11:17

This verse begins the doxology of the twenty-four elders who have fallen on their faces to worship God. In this act, they are "saying: 'We give You thanks, O Lord God

Almighty.'" The verb, though a common one in the gospels and epistles, is found only here in Revelation. It is *eucharisteó*, and it signifies to be thankful.

Here, in Revelation 11, we have an interesting parallel to John 11. The eleventh letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The eleventh letter, *kaph*, pictures an open palm, and it signifies "bend," "open," "allow," and "tame." In this chapter is found the *modeh anakhnu*, Hebrew for "We give you thanks," that would certainly be accompanied by the open, outstretched palms of the worshippers.

John 11 corresponds to this in Jesus' words of John 11:41, "I give you thanks," or *modeh ani* in Hebrew. In John 11, it is the same Greek word as here, *eucharisteó*. Both chapters also have the return of life from the dead. In John 11, it is Lazarus. In Revelation 11, it is the two witnesses. Jesus' prayer of thanks to the Father precedes the raising of Lazarus. The twenty-four elders' prayer of thanks to the Lord God Almighty follows the raising of the two witnesses.

Here, the term "Lord God Almighty" is repeated from verse 4:8 which was referring to Jesus on the throne. The term "Almighty" (Greek: *pantokratór*) was first claimed by Jesus in Revelation 1:8. That is next followed by the words, "The One who is and who was and who is to come."

Again, it is an expression spoken concerning Jesus in verses 1:4, 1:8, and 4:8 as well. To more fully understand the expression, reviewing the explanatory comments from Chapter 1 will help. Of the Lord on the throne, the elders next call out, "Because You have taken Your great power and reigned."

This is the main theme of the doxology – authority to rule. The Eternal One (who is and who was and who is to come) is the Creator. He is before His creation. His presence is above and yet in His creation, directing it. And He ever shall be, as He rules His creation.

Just as we move into the future, live in the present, and look back on the past, we also anticipate God's revelation. We live moment by moment in His revelation, and continuously look back and learn from the things He has revealed.

This is noted by the chorus of the twenty-four elders in saying "You have taken Your great power and reigned." In analyzing the three doxologies that have been given, the logical sequence of this heavenly scene goes from Creation to Redemption and then to the Authority to Rule –

- First doxology, Revelation 4: Creation (And by Your will they exist and were created).
- Second doxology, Revelation 5: Redemption (And have redeemed us to God by Your blood).
- Third doxology, Revelation 11: Authority to Rule (Because You have taken Your great power and reigned).

In Matthew 4, we read this account between the devil and Jesus –

> "Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.'" Matthew 4:8, 9

Jesus didn't question the devil's authority over the world. That dominion was lost at the fall of man, but Jesus regained the authority in His work on the cross. Now that authority is being exercised as the final judgments on the earth are being readied in anticipation of His millennial reign.

Life application: The term *pantokratór*, used when speaking of Jesus, is equivalent to the Lord of the hosts or Yehovah Sabaoth of the Old Testament. Jesus is the omnipotent Creator, Redeemer, and Ruler. He is sovereign over His creation and has full authority to reign. His purposes for man are being realized within His creation – the very creation He participated in when He walked among us.

This is the marvel of what God has done in the sending of His Son. We have rebelled against Him, we moved to the authority of the devil, but Jesus has destroyed the devil's works and has regained full authority over all things. For those who come to God through Him, there will be a complete restoration of all things, and the glory that lies ahead is beyond our ability to even grasp. Let us wait patiently as the redemptive narrative unfolds. In due time, we will receive our reward. In due time, we will see JESUS!

Glorious and Almighty God! The story which You have planned and participated in is beyond our comprehension. You came and united to Your creation in the Person of Jesus Christ. You walked among us and shared in our humanity. How can we not give You all the praise and honor and glory You are due! Great are Your works among the children of men! Amen.

The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints,
And those who fear Your name, small and great,
And should destroy those who destroy the earth. Revelation 11:18

The doxology of the twenty-four elders continues in this verse. It is a doxology of authority to rule, and because it is, it is a doxology that reveals the exercise of that rule, and that is revealed in several descriptive ways. The first is judgment, and is stated with the words, "The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come."

The thought here is very well reflected in the 2nd Psalm. In the first verse, the raging of the nations is mentioned. From there, the authority of the Son, the Lord's Anointed, is spoken of. From there, judgment and wrath are noted until the end of the psalm. This is then connected to Jesus' words in John 3 which confirm that there is only one avenue to avoid the wrath of God –

> "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." John 3:36

The immediate context that preceded this heavenly scene was that the two witnesses testified to the world. They were rejected and killed. Along with their being slain, the world rejoiced and sent gifts to one another. They acted as if they had gained the victory over God because they had gained victory over His witnesses. Because of the rejection of their message, a new phase in history is about to come into focus. This is revealed in the next words, "And the time of the dead, that they should be judged."

This is the second aspect of Christ's authority to rule: judgment. Due to the coming words, it appears that this is an overall judgment of humanity. Therefore, it is probably referring to the judgment recorded in Revelation 20:4-6 which precedes the millennium, and Revelation 20:11-15 which follows it. If this is so, then stating that the time for these things to come to pass means the sequence of events leading to them has allowed for them to occur, and they will happen in due time as prophesied. John next records, "And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints."

This would be the resurrection promised in Daniel 12:1-3 (and elsewhere), and then which is explicitly stated to Daniel in Daniel 12:13 –

> "But you, go *your way* till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days."

This judgment is known in Revelation 20:5 as "the first resurrection." It is a resurrection of reward and for the granting of eternal life. John next notes it also speaks of the prophets and saints in another way, saying, "And those who fear Your name, small and great."

These are surely not separate categories from the "prophets and saints," but are rather descriptors of them. There are true prophets who fear the Lord's name, and there are false prophets who do not. There are both small (average) people and great people who fear His name (His saints), and there are those who do not. These will receive their reward and inheritance. And then there are others who will be dealt with differently, as John next notes, "And should destroy those who destroy the earth."

This is the third aspect of Christ's authority to rule: punishment. Peter speaks of the "wages of unrighteousness" in 2 Peter 2:13. People earn punishment through their conduct. This is how a properly functioning society works, and it is how the heavenly court will be run. The details for this judgment are found in Revelation 20:11-15 (also noted above). This will be the "second death" referred to in Revelation 20:6 and 20:14. The result of that judgment is summed up in verse 20:15 –

> "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

Life application: As noted above, the anger of the nations is spoken of in the 2nd Psalm. Peter then quotes this psalm in Acts 4 indicating that Jesus and His work are the fulfillment of what David prophesied. However, the cross and the resurrection are not something that was fought against at only one point in history. Instead, the nations have continued to rage against the work of Christ since that time. This will come to its final state during the tribulation period.

As the world rejects what Jesus has done, God's wrath is being stored up and will be poured out in great judgments. After this period of tribulation, there will come a 1000-year reign of Christ on earth. At both ends of this reign, there will be resurrections. Those prophets and saints who have gone before the time of the cross and those who died during the tribulation period will be a part of the first resurrection. This will include those who fear the Lord's name, small and great. In other words, God looks for faith in His unfaithful creatures, so just a little bit will do.

Each will receive his rest and reward based on the faith he exercised in his walk of life. And in contrast to the saved, there will be judgment and destruction for those who destroy the earth.

This is probably not just speaking of the physical earth, but of the people of the earth as well. At times in the Bible, the term "the earth" is used in this way, speaking of the earth's inhabitants. Those who destroy the lives and souls of people are striking out at God's image-bearers, and their judgment will be harsh.

Jesus tells us of this in Matthew 18:6 –

> "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Let us take heed to the words of Scripture and let us think soberly on what is being conveyed. All people are heading to one of only two possible ends – restoration with God and eternity in His presence, or dying apart from God's pardon that has been offered through Christ Jesus. In the case of the latter, it means an eternal swim in the Lake of Fire. Let us do our best to get the word out. Let us be sure to tell all of the marvel of what God has done in the giving of His Son for our sins. Let us also be sure to never miss the chance to sing out praises and thanks to Him for the giving of JESUS!

Holy, just, true, and righteous are Your judgments, O God. You have given us every chance and opportunity to turn to You through the giving of Your Son. And You have not made it hard. Instead, all You ask is that we live by faith, even faith as small as a mustard seed. Help us to think rightly and to use our time wisely that we may be saved from the Day which is surely coming. Amen.

Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail. Revelation 11:19

With the doxology of the twenty-four elders complete, John next says, "Then the temple of God was opened in heaven." The translation is confused. It should rather say, "Then the temple of God in heaven was opened." John is seeing a vision of the heavenly temple. And rather than the entire temple, this is referring to the Most Holy Place in the temple. This is the place where, in the earthly sanctuary, the Ark of the Covenant was set. It is the place where the Lord said He would dwell among Israel.

However, the book of Hebrews explains that the earthly sanctuary was only a type, or shadow, of the true sanctuary –

> "Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, **2** a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.
> **3** For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer. **4** For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; **5** who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See *that* you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." **6** But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." Hebrews 8:1-6

In other words, everything about the earthly sanctuary was given to represent a more perfect spiritual reality in heaven. To understand this, the entire series of sermons concerning the construction of the sanctuary, which is detailed in the book of Exodus, can be reviewed at the Superior Word website. This following links will take you to our written commentaries. You can find the Exodus study there.
(The Superior Word webpage also on Sermon Audio)

Every detail of its construction points to the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, what John is seeing is another revelation of Jesus Christ that points to spiritual truths. With this understanding, he next says, "and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple."

The ark of the covenant, in every detail, pictures Christ Jesus. Placed within it were the Ten Commandments, signifying that He is the embodiment of the law. The two poles picture the two testaments – the Old and the New. The mercy seat place on top of it pictures Christ, the place of propitiation for man. He is the spot where atonement is made, and where restoration is realized. And so on. This is only a small part of the typology that pointed to Christ.

Here, the significance of the ark being seen is based on the words of the doxology of the twenty-four elders. Their words spoke of the reigning authority of Christ, and of His judgments. As Christ is the embodiment of the law, He has full authority to judge according to the law. As He is the place of atonement, it is He who atones for the sins of those who are His. For those who are not His, their condemnation remains. In saying that the ark of the covenant is seen, it means that the basis for judgment – meaning the

law – is now being presented. With that in mind, the verse and the chapter end with, "And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail."

The wording is similar to verses 4:5 and 8:5 –

- lightnings, thunderings, and voices – 4:5
- noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake – 8:5
- lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail – 11:19

It can be seen that the number and types of events have increased. It is as if the wrath of God is increasing as the pages of Revelation continue to unfold. The terrifying events are similar to the great display that occurred when the Law of Moses was received on Mt. Sinai. The judgment on the world is based on this standard, which no one can meet. As Paul says in Romans 3:20 –

> "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

The law was given to show all people of the world their sinful state and that something more than our own works is needed, meaning the imputed righteousness of Christ. Here, the world has rejected this and will now be judged based on the standard set forth in the law. The world has rejected Christ's imputed righteousness as testified to by the bringing forth of the ark. Only the saints who trust in Christ alone, and not on some other standard of righteousness, are to be saved. The rest will perish in their unrighteousness.

Life application: For any who are willing to call on Jesus, mercy will be granted. God is infinitely merciful, and He understands our failings. However, He is perfect in His being, and only perfection may be accepted by Him. This perfection cannot be attained by our own efforts because we are already imperfect. What we need is the perfection of Christ to cover us. This is why the Bible uses the term "in Christ." It means just that. We are in Him, and when God looks at us, it is through the covering of His Son.

Let us be sure to let the world know this. The gospel is not merely one means of reconciliation with God. Rather, it is the ONLY means of reconciliation with Him. But in understanding our already fallen nature, we should be eternally grateful that God has even given us this one means of restoration. Yes, let us be forever grateful to God for the giving of JESUS!

O God, You have revealed to us the glory of Your Son and the magnificent work that He has accomplished for Adam's fallen seed. How great, yes, how truly great You are. Thank You, O God, for the perfect and glorious Gift who is Jesus our Lord! May we be sure to tell the world of this wonderful means of restoration and forgiveness while there is still time. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Revelation 12:1

Note for Chapter 12: The events portrayed in this chapter have been, and continue to be, used in an attempt to predict the future, such as the dating of the rapture. This is an incorrect, arrogant, and twisted approach to Scripture, and should be rejected by the follower of Christ, not pursued or applauded.

Regardless as to whether the evaluation of these verses by me is correct or not, it is certain that attempting to predict the dating of such future events is, in fact, wrong. Jesus indicates this in Acts 1. We are to allow God to work out the timing of future events according to His wisdom, and we are to not attempt to usurp the Lord by ignoring His words concerning such matters –

> "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. **8** But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:7, 8

Revelation 12:1 introduces a new interlude with beautiful symbolism of the workings of God through human history. During this display, in this and in the coming verses, there will be seven distinct characters and four different conflicts presented for contemplation.

In this verse, John begins with, "Now a great sign appeared in heaven." The word "sign" is correct. It is from the Greek word *sémeion*, and it is something that represents something else. In other words, circumcision was given to Israel as a "sign." It was to signify the coming of Christ who would "cut" the sin nature in man. Circumcision does not make a person righteous, but it rather anticipates righteousness. Thus, it is a "sign" of something to come.

Charles Ellicott rightly says of this word, "It is a sign which is seen: not a mere wonder, but something which has a meaning; it is not 'a surprise ending with itself,' but a signal to arrest attention, and possessing significance; there is 'an idea concealed behind it.'"

Now, we first see "a great sign in heaven." In Genesis 1:14, it says the heavenly lights were given "for signs and for seasons." There, the Hebrew word *oth* is used, carrying the

same general meaning as the Greek word used here. This is a clue that even the heavens declare the unfolding plan of God. The very order of the constellations carries His message and displays His wisdom. In Daniel 4:3, it is proclaimed, “How great are His signs!”

God has woven into the creation His workings in a way that reveals the message of redemption found in Jesus. Other types of signs we are given come from His word. They are symbolic messages which convey truths concerning reality. These are known as apocalyptic symbols.

In this verse, we begin to see one of them as John next describes the sign, saying, “a woman clothed with the sun.” To be “clothed” with something is to have that characteristic as one’s very nature. In the 104th Psalm, it says, “O Lord my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty, Who cover *Yourself* with light as *with* a garment…”

This woman then bears the radiance of the sun. In Malachi 4:2, the coming Messiah is called “the Sun of righteousness.” John next continues the description saying, “with the moon under her feet.” The moon is the lesser light which rules the night, as is indicated in Genesis 1:16. It is also the sign of coming judgment when it is eclipsed.

During an eclipse, it turns a blood-red color – a sign used several times in the Bible in this way (Joel 2:31, Acts 2:20, and Revelation 6:12). The full moon shines during the nighttime. But the night is also the time Jesus said holds the power of darkness (Luke 22:53). And so even during times of darkness, the reflection of the sun on the moon provides illumination.

John finishes the verse by saying, “and on her head a garland of twelve stars.” The stars were explained in Genesis when Joseph (whose life is used in the Bible as a picture of Christ) had a dream. They represent the twelve sons (and thus the twelve tribes) of Israel (Genesis 37:9).

With these things in mind, we can evaluate who this woman represents. Three main figures have been proposed by past scholars – Mary, the mother of Jesus; the church; or the Jewish nation.

It is certainly not Mary. She was the human mother of Jesus who came from one of the tribes of Israel. Further, the corresponding symbolism in the chapter surely negates it being her.

The woman is also not the church. As will be seen in the coming verses, the woman will bring forth a Son, who is Jesus. The church did not bring forth Jesus. Only a bias against the nation of Israel (the Jewish people) could come to such a conclusion.

What seems most likely is that the woman represents the nation of Israel who brought forth the Messiah. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah from the nation of Israel. He is the glory of Israel shining forth and clothing the nation with His splendor. He is the One adorned by the twelve tribes of Israel. He is the One who stands over the night in both rule and judgment. He was born from Israel. He lived as a Jew under the Law of Moses. He died in fulfillment of that law while, at the same time, establishing a New Covenant for the house of Israel and the house of Judah (See Jeremiah 31:31) in His blood. He was resurrected as a Jew. And He will return to His people Israel and rule among them from Jerusalem during the millennial reign.

Therefore, Israel is the most reasonable interpretation for who the woman is.

Life application: The apocalyptic literature in the Bible is interpreted in an almost unlimited number of ways in order to suit the preconceived notions of the interpreter. What is presented here is a "best guess" of the symbolism presented based on what the Bible has revealed already. As noted, Joseph's dream in Genesis revealed that the twelve stars reflected the twelve sons of Israel.

The main thing to remember is that the book of Revelation is given to reveal Jesus. The symbolism, even if interpreted incorrectly in one point or another, is always given for this main purpose. As this is absolutely certain, and as Jesus has explicitly told us that we will not be made aware of the times and seasons for the fulfillment of future events, let us not insert ourselves into the narrative, except as the Bible has already done so.

As members of the church, and as we know there will be a rapture, we can rightly say, "I know I will be raptured someday." But when someone says, "I know when the rapture will be," he has inserted himself into the narrative in a manner that Jesus has said will not happen. Therefore, that person is to be ignored. In the end, let us be patient and do as the Lord says for us to do. Let us be witnesses to the wonderful workings of God in Christ. Let us be witnesses for our precious Lord JESUS.

Lord God, Your word shows us that You have a plan, and that plan is being worked out carefully and precisely in the stream of time. You have shown that You will bring Your people to Yourself some wonderful day. But You have also given us work to do while we are here. Help us to be faithful to that calling, just as You are faithful in working out your

plans. You are the God who will fulfill every promise You have made, and at just the right time. Praise You for Your faithfulness. Amen.

Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. Revelation 12:2

John's vision of the woman, clothed with the sun, continues now, saying, "Then being with child." The woman, who is believed to represent Israel (see the previous commentary), bears a son. This could be one of two circumstances. It could be Israel bringing forth the Messiah at the time of Christ's first advent, or it could be Israel in the end times symbolically bringing forth Messiah (accepting Him as Messiah). More likely, it is the latter.

It is from a mother that a child is born. In other words, it is Israel who brought forth the Child who is the Redeemer and Lord. Jesus was not brought forth by the church. Instead, the church issued from His work at the cross. It is absurd to think the church brought forth Jesus.

The symbolism now being conveyed goes all the way back to Genesis 3:15 which is known as the Protoevangelium, or the "first Gospel."

> "And I will put enmity
> Between you and the woman,
> And between your seed and her Seed;
> He shall bruise your head,
> And you shall bruise His heel." Genesis 3:15

The seed of the woman would be the one to destroy the devil's work. In the physical sense, this was Mary in whose womb Christ was conceived, but Mary was of the seed of Israel and the line of David. It is this group of people who are symbolically represented by the woman. John next says, "she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth."

This is a reference to Isaiah 26:17 which is speaking of Israel –

> "As a woman with child
> Is in pain and cries out in her pangs,
> *When* she draws near the time of her delivery,
> So have we been in Your sight, O Lord."

The symbolism of Israel being the woman continues in Isaiah 66 –

"Before she was in labor, she gave birth;
Before her pain came,
She delivered a male child.
8 Who has heard such a thing?
Who has seen such things?
Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day?
Or shall a nation be born at once?
For as soon as Zion was in labor,
She gave birth to her children." Isaiah 66:7, 8

Again, in Micah, it says –

"Be in pain, and labor to bring forth,
O daughter of Zion,
Like a woman in birth pangs.
For now you shall go forth from the city,
You shall dwell in the field,
And to Babylon you shall go.
There you shall be delivered;
There the LORD will redeem you
From the hand of your enemies." Micah 4:10

The church is never said to be such an entity.

Life application: As noted in the previous verse, the words of this chapter of Revelation have been, and continue to be, used to predict the dating of end-times events. By looking to conjunctions in the stars and equating them with the symbolism in Revelation, people have scammed countless multitudes into believing they have determined a set date for events like the rapture, the second coming, and so on.

If you are presented with such an analysis, don't waste your time on the video, and be sure not to waste your money on the book. The future will unfold exactly as God intends, and it will not be as they predict. Be sure of this. We are given a general outline of events so that when they happen, those who have experienced them will know it was of God. The only thing that happens when people insert themselves into the narrative in advance is that they damage other people's faith, and they make themselves look stupid.

In the end, let us be patient and do as the Lord says for us to do. Let us be witnesses to the wonderful workings of God in Christ. Let us be witnesses for our precious Lord JESUS.

Heavenly Father, since the world began, You have spoken through Your holy prophets concerning the coming of the Messiah. And You have brought Him forth through Your beloved people Israel. And now all nations share in the rich heritage of the birth of Your Son – fully God and fully man. Thank You for what Christ Jesus means in our lives. We once again have restoration with you. Hallelujah and Amen.

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. Revelation 12:3

John continues with the vision which began in verse 12:1. The woman clothed in the sun has cried out in labor and in pain, ready to give birth. After noting this, John continues, saying, "And another sign appeared in heaven." This doesn't mean a new vision, but another part of the same unfolding vision.

Being a "sign," it is given to represent something else. In other words, the language is not to be taken as literal. Rather, what is seen is given as an allegory. Just as the woman is given as a picture of Israel, what is seen here is only a picture representing other things. As it is seen "in heaven," it is representing spiritual matters. With that understood, John says, "behold, a great fiery red dragon."

The word *drakón*, translated as "dragon," is introduced into Scripture here. It will be seen thirteen times in Revelation. Of this word, HELPS Word Studies states –

"...properly '*seeing one*,' used of mythical dragons (*huge* serpents) seeing their prey from far away; (figuratively) *Satan* (Rev 12:7,9) exercising
his *subtle* (*indirect*) *impact* on *heathen governments* (powers) – i.e. accomplishing his hellish agenda from '*behind the scenes*.'"

As stated, this dragon can represent Satan, or it can represent the powers of Satan as worked out in governments. The same Greek word is found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in the account of the serpent on the pole in Numbers 21. It is also used in Job 41:1, Isaiah 27:1, Jeremiah 51:34, and Ezekiel 29:3 – all in various ways. For example, in Ezekiel, it is used as a metaphor for Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

The description of it being "great" signifies that it is large and powerful. The color, translated as "fiery red," was used in verse 6:4. This is its last use in Scripture. As seen

then, the color being fiery red is overwhelmingly agreed upon to signify war, just as the planet Mars, the red planet, is a symbol of war. This probably isn't coincidence as even from the first chapter of the Bible, the heavenly objects are meant "for signs and for seasons." Planets and constellations are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible in this way.

Of this dragon, John next says it is "having seven heads." The symbolism here is probably that of a group of nations. This type of apocalyptic literature was seen in the Old Testament writings, such as in Daniel 7. The dragon is a body of united governments, and the heads probably represent individual nations. From there, it says, "and ten horns." Horns in Scripture signify power and authority. What is seen here is similar to the words of Daniel –

> "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It *was* different from all the beasts that *were* before it, and it had ten horns. **8** I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, *were* eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words." Daniel 7:7, 8

John next says, "and seven diadems on his heads." The word translated as "diadem," is *diadéma*. This is its first use in Scripture and it will be seen three times. It signifies a royal crown. HELPS Word Studies says –

"...referring to: a) the pagan empires of ancient history which *opposed* God (Rev 12:3); b) the end-times coalition led by Antichrist (Rev 13:1); and c) the *infinite majesty* (*kingship*) *of Christ* (Rev 19:12)."

Their analysis places this account in Revelation 12:3 as ancient history. This is a possibility. As this is apocalyptic literature, it could be a panorama of past history leading into the future, or it could be events that are yet ahead in the redemptive narrative. Those options will be explored in the verses ahead. For now, the symbolism appears to be –

- A great, fiery red dragon – An entity filled with satanic influence, bent on war.
- Having seven heads – Comprised of seven distinct nations.
- And ten horns – Under the authority of ten powerful rulers.
- And seven diadems on his heads – Seven of the entities are kingdoms or nations under a single leader rule.

Obviously, there is speculation as to the structure of this beast, but this gives a general outline of what it may be comprised of.

Life application: Jesus called the devil "a murderer from the beginning…" Right from the time of the creation of man, the devil set out to kill and destroy. In the Garden of Eden, he tempted man and caused death to enter the world when man believed his lies. He continues to deceive and destroy both individuals and nations. He does it by influencing people and nations as well.

The picture given here is a corporate body that has been established on earth and which has the intent of thwarting God's purposes for the redemption of man. This redemption was promised all the way back in Genesis 3:15 and reflects the anticipated Messiah. From the beginning, and even until today, all of the devil's efforts are to undermine what God has done in and through Christ.

But the devil is a created being. He is finite and limited. God is infinite and unlimited. There should be no fear that the devil can steal one of the redeemed of the Lord away. Such cannot occur. Once a person is saved by the blood of the Lamb, he is forever secure. Let us trust this and not be overcome with anxiety about the wiles of the devil. Let us put our hope, trust, and confidence in the Lord's Christ. Let us fix our eyes on JESUS!

Oh God, no matter what the devil tries and no matter how fierce are his minions who work his evil, we know that You are infinitely greater. We know that Your plans and purposes for the restoration of all things will never be thwarted. Your book is written and the prophecies are given. We can watch them unfold with great surety that all will come about as stated! Amen.

His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. Revelation 12:4

John now continues with his description of the vision before his eyes. In the previous verse, he described the great, fiery red dragon. He continues with that imagery now, saying, "His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven."

Like in verse 6:13 and elsewhere, the meaning of the words "stars" is not intended to be taken literally. Rather, it is speaking of either heavenly beings, such as angels (thus these would be fallen angels), or it is speaking of humans in high positions, religious or

otherwise. This is seen, for example, in Daniel 8:10. Regardless as to which is correct, John next says, “and threw them to the earth.”

Possibly these beings were in powerful, or exalted, positions and have been cast out of those positions. The dragon is probably a symbol of Satan’s power being worked out in a human government. As such, it would then mean that it has consolidated great power by removing people from their high positions. These “stars” could be either religious or political figures. Either way, the dragon has strengthened its own authority by removing these figures. In this strengthened position, it then says, “And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth.”

Again, the woman is Israel, not the church. If the dragon is speaking of an earthly system, the idea is that this great power is ready to act against Israel at the time of her giving birth. The reason for this is “to devour her Child as soon as it was born.”

Here, the translators have chosen to capitalize the word “Child,” thus they have interpreted this to indicate that it is Christ Jesus. The Greek word is *teknon*. It means a child, descendant, or even inhabitant. Such a child can be a fully grown person, such as is assumed to be the case in Matthew 9:2 –

> “Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.’”

In that verse in Matthew, the word “son,” is the Greek word *teknon*. John uses the term numerous times in his epistles when speaking of believers in Christ. Thus, it reflects a state of being. HELPS word studies defines it as –

“...properly, a *child*; (figuratively) anyone living in *full dependence* on the heavenly *Father*, i.e. fully (*willingly*) relying upon the Lord in *glad submission*. This prompts God to *transform* them into *His likeness*.”

If the word “Child” here is speaking of Christ, which is the likely interpretation, it could be referring to Him at any time.

In other words, the dragon has positioned itself in anticipation of the birth of the Child. Therefore, this scene is either a look back into the past at the coming of Christ, or a look into the future when Israel is about to “give birth” to their knowledge of Christ, whom they have rejected for the past millennia. Either way, the woman is Israel, not the

church. Christ wasn't born from the church. Rather, the church came from Christ's completed work.

As Revelation is a book of prophecy, and unless this portion of the vision is looking back to the birth of Christ, it is most probable that what is being described here is actually future. Even though Christ was literally born two thousand years ago, He has not yet been "born" into the life of Israel. However, with the coming of the two witnesses, the people have come to the point where He is coming to be understood as their Messiah.

The idea of giving birth in this manner is not unknown to Scripture. Paul uses similar terminology in Galatians 4 –

> "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, **20** I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you." Galatians 4:19, 20

Life application: Satan has been at war with the message of the coming Christ since the beginning. He was prophesied all the way back in Genesis 3:15. From that time on, the devil has used every means possible to thwart this redemptive process. In His first advent, Israel rejected Him. But He promised He would return to them when they called out to Him –

> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! **38** See! Your house is left to you desolate; **39** for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" Matthew 23:27-39

When Christ returns, Satan will be bound for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2). In order to stop this, he will work to again subvert the very people through whom Christ came and to whom He has promised to return. But the book is written, and the devil is not God. God's plans cannot be thwarted!

If the scene John is describing is future, as is the likely scenario, the attempt to subvert Israel's conversion and to stop the coming millennial reign of Christ will not succeed. This is because God has spoken. What He has determined will come to pass. There will be the promised rule among Israel, and it will be under the authority of God's Messiah, our Lord JESUS!

Lord, the plan You have laid out in the Bible is glorious and it is one that spans the ages. From Adam all the way to the end, You are in complete control. Despite our weaknesses and failings, You have accomplished wondrous deeds by bringing many of Your wayward children home by the work of this precious Child who came and dwelt among us! Amen.

She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Revelation 12:5

In the previous commentary, it was noted that the timeline of this could be speaking of the past, when Christ was born into the world, or it could be speaking of the future when Christ will be born into the nation of Israel as her Messiah. The latter view is surely correct. One's view on the matter will shape how the rest of the vision is formed. One option against the first view is that no definitive structure of the dragon fits past history at the time of Christ's birth. Therefore, it is most surely a future event when Israel is in the pains of labor concerning Messiah being born into the collective body.

The verbs of the verse support the latter view quite well. A more literal translation says, "and she brought forth a male child, who is about to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and caught away was her child unto God and His throne."

The verb "brought forth" is aorist. The verb "is about" is present. And the verb "caught away" is aorist. He was brought forth at a set time. He is about to rule the nations, and he was caught away at a set time. With this understood, John begins the verse with, "She bore a male Child." The Greek reads, "a Son, a male." As Vincent's says, "The object is to emphasize, not the sex, but the peculiar qualities of masculinity - power and vigor." That is then evidenced in the next words, saying, "who was to rule all nations."

The Greek, being in the present tense (noted above), conveys the thought of, "who is about to rule all nations." This is well reflected in the 2nd Psalm –

> "I will declare the decree:
> The LORD has said to Me,
> 'You *are* My Son,
> Today I have begotten You.
> **8** Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
> The nations *for* Your inheritance,
> And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.
> **9** You shall break them with a rod of iron;
> You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'" Psalm 2:7-9

In these words, Revelation 12 corresponds to the twelfth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The twelfth letter, *lamad*, pictures a shepherd's staff, and it signifies "teach," "yoke," "authority," and "bind." In this chapter is found the "male Child who is to rule all nations." In this case, and as noted in the psalm, it will be "with a rod of iron."

Iron denotes strength, be it in binding together, in government, in hard service, in bondage, etc. A rod of iron then means that the rule of this Son will be firm over the nations with no chance of it being overthrown or subverted. With that thought in mind, John continues the verse with, "And her Child was caught up."

As noted above, the verb is aorist. There is no reason that this cannot be speaking of a past event even though the previous clause is a future event. The Child of Israel, her Messiah, was caught up as is recorded in Acts 1 –

> "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. **10** And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, **11** who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.'" Acts 1:9-11

Christ ascended at that time, and He will return again to Israel, even to the same mount from which He ascended –

> "Then the LORD will go forth
> And fight against those nations,
> As He fights in the day of battle.
> **4** And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
> Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
> And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,
> From east to west,
> *Making* a very large valley;
> Half of the mountain shall move toward the north
> And half of it toward the south." Zechariah 14:3, 4

Until His return, however, John finishes the thought with the words, "to God and His throne." Jesus said to His disciples that He was going to His Father (John 14:12). He says a comparable thought several times elsewhere, such as in John 20:17. Upon His ascension, He returned to God. In this ascension, it is to the throne of God, as is

evidenced already in Revelation. The throne is the position of power and authority. This is where He remains until He will come again.

Life application: Some commentators claim that this verse is speaking of the Church, and not Jesus, because "her Child was caught up to God and to His throne." The idea is that the Church, not Jesus, will be raptured in the twinkling of an eye. Another support for this view is that in Revelation 2:27, Jesus grants authority to those who overcome (meaning those who make up the Church) to rule [the nations] with a rod of iron.

This is incorrect. The authority that is granted here is referring to the overall ruler of the nations (as is defined in Psalm 2 noted above). This rule belongs to the Messiah. Further, the Greek of the verse, "a Son, male," dispels this. The repetition clearly identifies this One as an individual, not a corporate body. It is referring to Jesus and His right to rule.

Jesus, after His work on earth, was caught up to God. In like manner, the church will be gathered in the clouds. This verse then demonstrates that the church age is a distinct dispensation, and also that Christ will return again to rule during the millennium.

In other words, God is not through with the Jewish people and there is still a plan for them in the future. This future begins with the tribulation period of Revelation and continues through the millennial reign. In order to dismiss this, doctrine will suffer. Further, the analysis of the remaining chapters of Revelation will only become more and more convoluted as scholars must "symbolize" passages that would otherwise be taken literally.

God has a plan for the Jewish people, and Jesus will return to them. Their unfaithfulness in no way negates His faithfulness. This is a wonderful truth that extends even to us. Though we fail in many ways, if we are His, He will never reject us. This is the glory of God's Christ. He is ever faithful and true. He is JESUS!

Lord, it is evident that even when we are faithless, You remain faithful. When we turn our backs on You, You still abundantly forgive when we turn and call on Jesus as Lord. Thank You for this. And thank You for being faithful to the people of Israel despite their disobedience. Great and splendid is Your working in and for the people of Your world! Amen.

Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.
Revelation 12:6

Here we have a portion of the timeline that corresponds to Daniel 9:27 –

> "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
> But in the middle of the week
> He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.
> And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
> Even until the consummation, which is determined,
> Is poured out on the desolate."

What appears to be the case, is that the prophesying of the two witnesses comprised the first half of the tribulation period. As it said in Chapter 11 –

> "But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot *for* forty-two months. **3** And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." Revelation 11:2, 3

After that point, they are killed and taken to heaven (11:12). This corresponds to Daniel 9:27 that says, "But in the middle of the week." Their prophesying is 42 months, or three- and one-half years. That is "the middle of the week," meaning the middle of this seven-year period.

It is at the middle of the week that the two witnesses are killed, and sacrifice and offering are also ended. It would be at this point that the words of Paul also come into play –

> "Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, **4** who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."
>
> -2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4

It is this person that confirms the covenant of Daniel 9, and it is this person who will end the sacrifice and offering at the temple and sit in the temple of God. It appears that at this time, Israel will realize that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies, hence the words of verse 12:4 where it says that the woman was "ready to give birth." In other words, the understanding of who their Messiah is begins to become known to the people.

If this is the proper understanding of the timeline and events, John now says, “Then the woman fled into the wilderness.” In understanding that Jesus is their long-rejected Messiah, they will also begin to read His words for understanding of what is expected of them. Why would they flee into the wilderness? It is because the Lord told them to do so –

> “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), **16** “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. **17** Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. **18** And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. **19** But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! **20** And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. **21** For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. **22** And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.” Matthew 24:15-22

Jesus’ words of the “abomination of desolation” speak of Daniel 9:27 cited above. The believers in Israel are told, in advance, that when they see this occur, they are to flee to the mountains. This is the second half of the tribulation period, and it will be the worst time ever experienced on the planet. But in taking Jesus’ words to heart, believing (not all, only the believers) Israel will be saved. This is because they will flee into the wilderness “where she has a place prepared by God.”

There is much speculation as to where this is. Based on the words of Jesus, this is a real group of people who will actually flee from Judea into the mountains. This is not to be taken metaphorically. Some speculate that they will flee to Petra, in Jordan. Wherever it is, the place is prepared for these people, and God will sustain them. As it says, “that they should feed her there.”

This clearly and absolutely defines the woman of verse 12:1 as Israel. It is Israel who is now in the land, it is Israel who Jesus was speaking to concerning events that would come upon them, and the church has already been taken at the rapture. Those of Israel who believe in Jesus will follow His word, flee into the mountains, and God will tend to them there. And this will be for “one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”

This is, again, a period of three- and one-half years. The Bible’s dating is one based on a three-hundred-and sixty-day calendar. Three- and one-half years, then, is one thousand two hundred and sixty days. This period then corresponds to the second half of the prophecy of Daniel 9:27. The timing fits, the actors in the great unfolding drama are

identified, and the events of the other portions of Scripture properly align with what is stated in Daniel, Matthew, 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation.

Life application: With Israel in the land once again, many prophecies will be set to come to fulfillment. At the half-way point of the tribulation, which is forty-two months, the covenant which was made with Israel by the anti-Christ three- and one-half years earlier will be broken. These day and month timeframes are certainly to be taken literally and there are several reasons for this.

The first is that the 490-year period of Daniel 9:24-27 has been fulfilled literally, and to exact and verifiable dates. Of this 490-year period, 483 years have come to completion. This leaves a 7-year period remaining, which was promised to Israel by God. Like the other dating, this will also be exact.

A second reason to take this timeframe literally is because it is repeated several times in Revelation. It is a strong indication that they are not merely symbolic of an unknown timeframe. Israel, the woman, will be facing destruction at this mid-point of the tribulation, but God has prepared a place for her.

There is no need to worry about the ravings of people like the Iranians who say they will wipe Israel from the map. This will never happen. God will keep and protect His people in anticipation of the millennial reign of Christ. The promises have been made, God is faithful in keeping them, and He shall do so for the world to know and understand who His Christ is. They will come to see that He is JESUS!

Lord God, the events in the world today are lining up with what Your word says things will be like at the end of days. Because of this, we can look around and discern that You are in complete control of the ages. This beautiful play spans millennia, and yet is revealed beforehand in Your word. This tells us that You see all of time at once and have complete control over it! How absolutely magnificent You are! Amen.

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, Revelation 12:7

John has been describing the events, most probably future to us now, concerning Israel's birthing of Jesus as their Messiah. This is symbolized by the woman bearing a Child. It said in the previous verse that "the woman fled into the wilderness." There she will be kept by God for a set period of time. Now, John's eyes are directed to another vision that is not necessarily chronological, but rather it is topical. He says, "And war broke out in heaven."

It is an aorist verb. At a particular time, not necessarily at the time of the events previously described, war broke out in heaven. There are innumerable ideas about the event, but the two most likely scenarios are either 1) that this was at the beginning when the heavenly hosts rebelled against divine authority, or 2) that this occurred at the time of Christ's work – His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

It seems most likely that the first scenario is what is being described. It is what Jude 1:6 appears to be referring to –

> "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day."

The words of Jude are speaking of heavenly beings, and they follow after Peter's words found in 2 Peter 2:4 –

> "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment."

It is the same thought presented by Jude. Peter did not state precisely what sin was involved, but Jude expanded upon it, saying, "who did not keep their proper domain." The word translated as "domain" is *arché*. It signifies "beginning," as in time, but also the first as in principality or rule. Some translations will choose one option, others the other option. As this is speaking of angels that are in a place of authority, it is certainly speaking of the latter. Paul uses it this way in Ephesians 6 –

> "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places.*" Ephesians 6:12

These angels departed from their place of rank and authority. It is these angels which today are known as demons, and it is these unholy forces that Paul refers to. Jude next said, "but left their own abode." The word he used speaks of a place of habitation; a house. The obvious conclusion is that in leaving their place of rule, they left their place where the rule occurs, meaning heaven.

In heaven, they were in a particular authority where angels were created to minister to man (see Hebrews 1:14). However, rather than ministering to man, the angels wanted to rule over man. This is clearly indicated in Paul's words of Ephesians 6, but it is also

found in Matthew 8, Mark 5, and Luke 8 in regard to the demoniac in the country of the Gergesenes (also known as the Gaderenes).

In these passages, it is seen that having left their heavenly abode, the angels came to earth, not as ministering spirits for God, but as invaders under Satan. Instead of being servants for the benefit of men, they came as tyrants over men. Understanding this, John continues with his words concerning this, saying, “Michael and his angels fought with the dragon.”

Michael, which means “who is like God,” is the archangel, or chief of the angels. He is mentioned four times in the Bible. He is first mentioned in Daniel 10:21 where it is said to Daniel that he is “your prince.” This is a little vague, but it is explained more fully in Daniel 12:1. In that verse, Michael is called “the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people.” Thus, the connection is with Israel. Daniel, being of the nation of Israel, shows that Michael is the protector of them.

Michael is also mentioned in the 65th book of the Bible, Jude. It is there that his designation as the archangel is made. John noted that Michael, along with his angels, fought with the dragon. The question is, “Is this ‘dragon’ the same as that referred to in verse 12:3?” The answer is, “Probably not.” And yet, the dragon of verse 12:3 is under the authority and rule of this dragon here in verse 12:7. In other words, and as noted in verse 12:3, the dragon can represent Satan, or it can represent the powers of Satan as worked out in governments. The dragon now being referred to in verse 12:7 is explicitly said to be “the Devil and Satan” in verse 12:9.

And so, what appears to be happening here in verses 12:7-9 (and which then includes a continued explanation of the event even through verse 13) is an accounting of why there is the great hostility of Satan towards the redemptive plan of God as is being worked out in history, and most especially as is recorded in the book of Revelation. God is working through a specific group of people, Israel, as He works out His plans. Those plans continue even after the rapture of the church as Israel is brought back into the focus of the redemptive narrative. With that understanding, the words of John continue, saying, “and the dragon and his angels fought.”

This concerns the events that begin during the angelic rebellion. Satan (the dragon) rebelled, and Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. Again, as stated previously, this part of the narrative is included to show us why there is hostility against the people of God. In thwarting God’s plans, it would show that He is incapable of keeping the promises He has made, promises which include protecting Israel and maintaining them as a people.

Life application: There really are spiritual battles being waged and they have occurred since the beginning, even as is recorded in Chapter 3 of Genesis. They will continue until the 20th chapter of Revelation. For those in Christ, we continue in that spiritual battle, as Paul reveals in Ephesians 6.

Through Christ, we have an assured victory, but until we are taken to glory, we still must face the attacks of the devil. The way to be prepared for those attacks is to know the word of the Lord and to put on the full armor of God as is described in it. If we do this, our effectiveness in thwarting the devil's attacks will be possible. In the end, let us pursue this path standing firm in our faith in the Lord. Yes, let us be confident in our Lord JESUS!

Lord, help us to properly balance our spiritual lives, understanding that there is a devil and that we are in a battle against him and his forces as we continue our walk towards glory. But at the same time, help us to remember that we already have the final victory in Christ. Help us to not have unbalanced priorities by focusing too much on a battle with a defeated foe. In Christ, the victory is assured! Amen.

but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.
Revelation 12:8

This continues the thought of the previous verse. It is a look back on the reason why the devil and his angels have so relentlessly pursued God's people over the ages –

> "And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, **8** but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer." Revelation 12:7, 8

In an attempt to rule God's creation, a heavenly war broke out. Little is actually stated about this event, but it can be inferred that it is a spiritual battle for control over humanity. Satan (the serpent of Genesis 3) entered the picture and deceived man. At that time, the man was cursed. Hints of these things are scattered throughout the Bible, but not enough to form more than a cursory picture of what is being referred to now by John.

However, this has not stopped sensationalists from publishing innumerable volumes of books claiming insights into these things. They sell well simply because they are sensational, but they do not add anything of value to Scripture. What we do know is what John next says, "but they did not prevail."

The dragon and his angels were defeated by Michael and his angels. In what way they are defeated is not stated. As they are spirit beings, we can only form assumptions as to what actually occurred. However, this battle, and the ongoing results from it, might be what Jesus was referring to in Luke 10 –

> "Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.'
> **18** And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. **19** Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. **20** Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.'" Luke 10:17-20

It appears this battle may be what Jesus refers to because John next says, "nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer." Satan and his angels were cast out of the place, and the consequences of that are permanent. Of this, Charles Ellicott says, "The whole power of the evil hosts failed them. There is an inherent weakness in evil: a spot which may be touched whereupon all its vaunted strength withers."

Life application: Too often in our society, and going back for eons as well, men have credited the devil with far more power than he actually possesses. It is true that he has great power, and it is surely magnified when combined with those who rebelled with him. But the fact of the matter is that, despite his capabilities, it is far less than that of the heavenly host.

This verse shows that the devil and his angels could not prevail over the good angels, and they lost the heavenly realm that they once had access to. In an unfortunate turn of events for the world though, this means that their dominion is now where man treads upon the earth.

And yes, it is true that the devil causes havoc here. But the devil is finite while God is infinite. Therefore, whatever power the devil has is infinitely less than God's. Because of the work of Jesus Christ, we have access to the very throne of God. And through acceptance of His work, we become sons of God through adoption. Because of this, we have the strength of the Almighty to protect us. When things are tough, let us remember this –

> "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:16

There is a throne where God rules and He graciously allows us to enter His presence through the Mediator. When the devil is about and causing us grief, we need to remember this and use this heavenly gift to seek out comfort from our loving and all-powerful Creator. Because He has appointed a Mediator, let us be sure to go through Him, our Lord JESUS!

What great love You have poured out on us, O God! You sent Jesus to lead us back to You and to give us power over the devil. When we are afflicted, you offer comfort. When we are tired, you lead us to the still waters. When we are overwhelmed, you offer us a seat at Your table. Thank You, Lord. Please help us to remember this heavenly access when it is needed. Amen.

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Revelation 12:9

Verse 4 described the fiery red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. That was seen to be an earthly governmental body, probably a group of nations. Verse 4 said his tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Of those stars, it was determined that they were probably human rulers and could be either religious or political figures.

What is said in these verses shows that the dragon now being described is an angelic being. This account is given to reveal why this angelic being has concerned himself in earthly affairs. Michael and his angels defeated the dragon who then has worked out his wicked plans among humanity. If he cannot rule the universe, he determined that he would rule over God's highest form of creation in the universe.

With that in mind, John says, "So the great dragon was cast out." The Greek reads, "the dragon, the great." It is showing that this dragon is not the same as seen in the earlier verses, even if he is behind the power of that group of nations.

Saying he was "cast out" means that he lost his angelic position and no longer bears any authority or right to rule in the heavenly realm. With that stated, John then explains exactly who this great dragon is, saying, "that serpent of old."

Again, the Greek reads, "the serpent, the old." These words take the reader back to Genesis 3:1 where the serpent was introduced. It is he who deceived the man and brought him under the power of sin and death. In John 8:44, Jesus says –

> "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources,* for he is a liar and the father of it."

Jesus uses the term *archēs*, or "beginning." Here John uses the term *archaios*, meaning "original," "primitive," "ancient," and so on. Both words are etymologically linked. In other words, the connection between the serpent and the Devil has already been made in Scripture, but John's words now are definitively tying them together, as he next says of this serpent, "called the Devil and Satan."

The serpent is the Devil, but he is also Satan. The word comes from the Hebrew *ha'satan*, or "The Accuser." His role is poignantly highlighted in Job 1 and 2. In particular, it says in Job 1:6 (and as repeated in Job 2:1) –

> "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. **7** And the LORD said to Satan, 'From where do you come?'"

By this time, Satan had already been cast out of heaven and thrown down to the earth. Therefore, when it says that "the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord," it is not speaking of angels. Rather, it is speaking of men who worship the Lord. Satan, as he has done since the beginning, has come among them to destroy this union between men and the Lord. This is evidenced by Satan's response –

> "So Satan answered the LORD and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.'" Job 1:7

This is now his realm, and it is where he conducts his wicked affairs, just as both Paul and Peter state –

> "For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. **14** And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. **15** Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

> "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter 5:8

Even John refers to this working of Satan (the devil) in his first epistle –

> "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8

It is this entity, the serpent who is the Devil and Satan, "who deceives the whole world." He deceived Adam at the beginning, and he continues to deceive humanity. He will continue to do so right up until the time of the millennium where it says –

> "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. **2** He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; **3** and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while." Revelation 20:1-3

This is the foe that is being described now. The apocalyptic scene has taken us back to the very beginning to show what happened, and why the serpent has been hounding humanity all along. As noted above, if he cannot rule the universe in the spiritual realm, he would still attempt to rule over God's highest form of creation in the physical realm by working out spiritual darkness all around him. And this rule is one of deception. Jesus said so in John 8:44 (above) and Paul clearly indicates this in his words –

> "Now whom you forgive anything, I also *forgive*. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, **11** lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices."
>
> -2 Corinthians 2:10, 11

Seeing the progression of thought concerning him here helps us to understand what occurred and why. John finishes by saying that after he was defeated in heaven, "he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

The satanic and demonic forces of the spiritual realm are here because they were cast out of their position in heaven. Their desire is to thwart God's plans, ruin God's people, and to destroy humanity who bears God's image. If one wonders why, for example, women literally rejoice at the passing of laws allowing for abortion, it is because they are being influenced by the deception of the devil to destroy the very image-bearers of God that he is determined to destroy.

What John is describing now shows why the world is in the state it is in. Satan and his angels are here among us, and they are working out their wickedness as vehemently as they can.

Life application: The serpent corrupted man in the Garden of Eden and man fell. This fall has brought about wickedness in man since then. In similar fashion, the devil has also caused angels to fall along with him. It is the pride of his beauty and the lust of holding the power of the universe which brought all of this about. Instead of looking to his Creator, he looked to replace Him.

In the end though, it will only bring about his final and eternal destruction in the Lake of Fire. Until that day, he will continue to deceive the whole world and bring about more chaos and death.

Understanding that the dragon is the serpent, the devil, and Satan, we can see that all of these individual titles found elsewhere in the Bible are tied into this one wicked and destructive being.

It is he who even tempted the Lord at the beginning of his ministry, but he failed there. It is he who again tempted the Lord when Peter spoke and indicated that he wouldn't let Jesus fulfill His ministry by dying. Again, he failed there. The devil tried and failed in each instance to bring about ruin in the ministry of the Lord, but God's Messiah prevailed over his attempts. In this, we must be ever thankful because He has done what we could not do. He has destroyed the works of the devil because He is JESUS!

Great is the Lord God Almighty and wondrous are His deeds. The Lamb has prevailed over the work of the devil, and so all who call on Him are freed from the penalty of sin and rebellion which has endured throughout the ages. Thank You Lord for coming and releasing us from this impossible debt! Great and glorious is the Lamb of God! Amen.

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. Revelation 12:10

The translation should connect "loud voice" with "heaven." Thus, it should read, "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying..." Also, it omits definite articles that should be included: "the salvation, the power, and the kingdom of our God." In this, it signifies that these things are firmly manifested. Also, the word "accused" is a present participle. It should read "accuses."

Of the contents of this verse, Charles Ellicott is right when he says, "...it is not the full establishment of the kingdom which is here described; it is rather the manifestation of it." In other words, the victory is won, even if it is not yet fully realized. This is speaking of the state of things as fulfilled even while the actual occurring of the event is future.

With these things understood, John begins with, "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying" (NASB). It is a divine proclamation with the intent of conveying an absolute truth that can be held to for those who hear it. With that in mind, John continues with, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come" (NASB).

The verb is in the aorist tense, signifying that these things have come at a specific point in time. And yet, as just noted, these things are made manifest even though they have not been established. The only way to make this understood in English is to state them in the perfect tense.

To understand, if a new president is elected, the people can say, "Now is the time for our tax breaks, and now reason will be brought back to the White House." It is something that is assured, even though there are still several months before the new president is seated. This is the same idea here.

In saying, "Now is the salvation," it means that complete deliverance from Satan's power is realized through what has occurred, even if Satan is still affecting those who are saved. In saying, "Now is...the power," it conveys the idea that all that is necessary to ensure the final consummation of things has been put in place. And in saying, "Now is...the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ," it means that these things are assured for His people because of what has occurred.

To then explain why this is so, John next says, "for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night" (NASB 1977). Because Satan was cast out of heaven, he has no ability to accomplish anything within the heavenly realm to thwart the redemptive plan. Instead, he can only work within the limits of time to stand and accuse the people of the world. That is why the present tense "accuses" is used. It speaks of his ongoing accusations against humanity.

However, the words "our brethren" indicate that the accusations are against God's people, the redeemed. As such, they carry no weight. This will be seen in the coming verse. For now, the verse speaks of the reality of what God has done being made manifest. It cannot be thwarted, and the redemptive narrative that is prophesied in Scripture will certainly come about, exactly as the word reveals.

Life application: Since the beginning, Satan has continued to bring accusation and destruction to humanity. He did it in the Garden of Eden. He did it during Job's time – attempting to malign and destroy that godly man. He did it after the exiles of the Babylonian captivity when he stood accusing Joshua the High Priest in Zechariah 3:1. And, he stood to oppose Jesus during His time of fasting in the wilderness.

Satan has been active throughout the ages and he continues to accuse the church, even to this day –

> "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter 5:8

The devil has been active, but the book is written, and the writings are sealed. His time is limited, and he will be cast down. Great is the Lord who has defeated the devil! Great is the One who has prevailed. He is our Savior. He is JESUS!

Heavenly Father, please give us strength to resist the devil. Be with us, O God, in our times of weakness and temptation. We know the victory is won, but in our flesh, we are still weak and at risk of falling. Help us to never do that which would bring dishonor to You and Your glorious name. Amen.

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Revelation 12:11

The words of this verse are referring to those in the previous verse, those whom the devil had accused before God day and night. These fallible Christians were unworthy in and of themselves to attain eternal life or the blessings of God. However, their failings are turned into glory because of the work of Another, Jesus. As John next says, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb."

It is an aorist verb, "they have overcome." The deed was accomplished, and it is done. Also, the Greek uses the preposition *dia*, meaning "through." Thus, it reads, "they have overcome through the blood." The meaning is "because of," "by reason of," or "on account of" the blood.

The devil can accuse all day long, but those accusations mean nothing when one is in Christ. By faith in what He has done, a person overcomes –

> "I write to you, little children,
> Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

13 I write to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
Because you have overcome the wicked one.
I write to you, little children,
Because you have known the Father.
14 I have written to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning.
I have written to you, young men,
Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you,
And you have overcome the wicked one." 1 John 2:12-14

John, writing to fellow believers, wrote extensively about overcoming. Exactly what it means to "overcome" is explained in detail in the commentary of Revelation 2:7. To understand that more fully, please refer to that analysis.

In the passage from 1 John 2, it explicitly says that in knowing Him who is from the beginning, one has overcome the wicked one. It is through this knowledge, and by acting upon it by receiving what Christ has done, that a person overcomes. In saying, "by the blood of the Lamb," it is speaking of the all-sufficient and substitutionary atoning death of Jesus Christ that this comes about. The blood stands as representative of the work of Christ, culminating in His sacrificial death. With this understanding, John next says, "and by the word of their testimony."

The thought is similar to 1 John (above) where it says, "Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you." The word of God is the basis for the word of one's testimony. Anyone can have a testimony, but what is that testimony based on? If it is based on the word of God which tells of Christ Jesus, then it will be a properly directed testimony. For these saints, they have overcome, but that overcoming is – at times – not without a cost. As John says, "and they did not love their lives to the death."

The idea here is not that they have overcome because they went to their death, but that they were willing to go to their death because they had overcome. It is reflective of what Jesus said in his words to the church at Smyrna –

> "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."
> -Revelation 2:10

The death referred to is not a means of overcoming, it is – at times – an anticipated result of it. The scholar Alford renders these words, "they carried their not-love of their life even unto death." What is it that the saint is to love the most? It is not his own life. It is to love the Lord with all of one's heart and mind and soul. When He is our highest joy and our greatest hope, the life we currently live will find its proper perspective.

Life application: No one deserves the approval of God because all have inherited Adam's sin, and all have then heaped up more sins in this life. This is evident because the devil stands accusing us before God. There would be no accusation if there were no actual guilt. However, with this guilt the prosecution then steps forward, fingers pointed at us.

But God has allowed our sin to be transferred to a qualified Substitute – Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God. When we call out to Him in faith, we are saved through His blood. And that is based on the word of our testimony. This word is the simple proclamation of every believer, "Jesus is Lord."

When we confess Jesus as Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, Paul writes in Romans that we are saved. Why does Paul tie belief in the resurrection with Jesus being Lord? Only a dummy would call on a dead lord because a dead lord is no lord.

Jesus prevailed over death because He never sinned, also proving He didn't inherit Adam's sin (and thus, Adam's guilt). The Bible says, "the wages of sin is death." Because Jesus didn't sin, He was resurrected to eternal life, having paid our sin debt by His blood.

Peter describes the absolutely incomprehensible value of the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ – "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

Let us be ever grateful for what God has done through Christ. In Him we too are overcomers. Praise God for the Lamb! Praise God for JESUS!

Glorious and Almighty God! You have done for us what we could never have done for ourselves. You have redeemed us from the wages of sin by paying for them through the life and vicarious death of Your own Son. All hail the glorious and splendid works that You have accomplished for us. All hail the Lamb – our Lord and Savior, Jesus! Amen.

Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." Revelation 12:12

The previous verses relayed the fact that the devil and his angels were cast to the earth. However, those who had come to Christ "overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." With that in mind, the words of this verse now are a point of rejoicing for some, and of terror for others. In them, John begins with, "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them."

The word translated as "dwell" is *skénoó*. It signifies the pitching of a tent, and thus tabernacling. HELPS Word Studies says, "For the Christian, 4637 (*skēnóō*) is dwelling in intimate communion with the resurrected Christ – even as He who Himself lived in unbroken communion with the Father during the days of His flesh (Jn 1:14)."

Those who "did not love their lives to the death" of the previous verse are now given their rest as they rejoice and tabernacle in intimate communion in heaven. However, John continues with, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea!"

The word translated as "inhabitants" is set in contrast to those who tabernacle. It signifies one who is a permanent resident. The earth is his home. Whereas those who gave up their lives found life, those who keep their lives will only find woe. The reason for this is then given by John, saying, "For the devil has come down to you."

This has been true since he was cast out of heaven, but now there is a difference and a sense of urgency to the matter. Christ has come, the redemptive plan of God has been worked out for two thousand years, and during that time the devil has continued to wreak havoc among men. However, those who were Christ's have always been safely guarded by Him. But with the church gone at the rapture, and with those who followed that event through martyrdom, there is only the world with very little resistance left.

Because of this, the remaining part of the tribulation period will be as close to hell on earth as anything man has ever seen. In fact, Jesus said as much –

> "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. **22** And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." Matthew 24:21, 22

It is now, during this period that the devil will bring great chaos to the earth. He is, as John says, "having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." The devil is aware of what lies ahead. He knows he will be bound for a thousand years. But before that happens, it is his intent and design to bring utter ruin to as many as he can. He will work as much devastation in just a few years as he has brought in eons before this.

The sad part of this is that the words are written for any and all to see. Countless houses have a copy of the Bible lying around, and yet how many will see this terrible time firsthand because they failed to simply pick it up and accept God's pardon which has been offered through the giving of Christ.

Life application: The devil knows the Bible and the prophecies it contains. The world has come to the point of the tribulation period where there is no remedy left. The remaining amount of time is known directly from the Bible. It is a three- and one-half year span where the devil will work his iniquity. He will do this through the antichrist and the false prophet, and the world will follow their lead.

Once the wheels are placed in motion, nothing can stop them because the book is sealed. In our hands is God's eternal and unchanging word – the Holy Bible. It is a roadmap to the events to come and it is completely reliable in all it contains and proclaims. The world will face many great calamities during this period. This is not only spoken in Revelation. Isaiah speaks of what is coming as well. In his prophecies, he says that man will become more rare than fine gold.

Few will survive the calamitous events of the last half of the tribulation. But for the people who trust in the Lord, there will be rest. Now is the time to call out to Him and be saved. Now is the time to put your hope, trust, and faith in JESUS.

Surely there is a time for rejoicing and a time for mourning. Lord, in the life of those who have called on you, there is the surety of eternal salvation. But in the lives of many others, there isn't that assurance. Please hear our prayers for those who have not yet called on Jesus. We pray that they will know You before their time of judgment comes. Amen.

Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *Child*. Revelation 12:13

The previous verse revealed that the earth's inhabitants would face woe. The devil, being filled with great wrath, knows his time is short. With that context in mind, John

next says, “Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth.” As seen previously, the dating of when this event occurred is debated.

The heavenly scene John is witnessing is showing truths that have occurred or will occur, but when each occurs can be hard to pin down. Whether the dragon was cast down in a heavenly battle at the beginning, whether it was at the time of Christ’s crucifixion, or whether it occurred at some unstated point in history, it did occur. The most likely timing of the event was at the beginning. During Christ’s ministry, he was already dwelling on the earth. This is because Jesus says as much in John 12:31 –

> “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”

The implication is that he was already cast out of heaven. He then deceived the man and became the ruler of the earth. At the time of Christ’s cross, he was then cast out of his authority to rule on the earth.

In being cast down, the dragon is working his evil within the confines of time, and time is ever moving forward. In this futile state, he will continue his attempt at thwarting the plan of God. He did this to Israel before the coming of Christ, to Christ in the temptations recorded in the gospels, and in his continued attempts to thwart God’s plans since then. John next records who his continued target is, saying, “he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.”

As has been seen, it is common for scholars to claim this is the church. The idea is, “Israel is no longer God’s people, Jesus has prevailed and is in heaven, and so this must be speaking of the church.” That is incorrect. Christ came from Israel, not the church. The biblical fact is that though Israel has been under punishment for rejecting Christ, they are still God’s people, and the Lord has made promises to them that stand. The devil, persecuting Israel, is an attempt to – once again – thwart the plans of God.

<u>Life application:</u> The terrible time of tribulation for Israel was prophesied by Jeremiah and will be a time like no other in their history –

> “Alas! For that day *is* great, So that none *is* like it; And it *is* the time of Jacob’s trouble, But he shall be saved out of it.” Jeremiah 30:7

This “time of Jacob’s trouble” will be an immense test for Israel. Yet Jeremiah assured us in speaking the word of the Lord, assures us that “he shall be saved out of it.” No matter how tough the times are, God has and always will preserve His people Israel. This is because He is the great covenant-keeping Creator.

As this is so, and especially considering the fact that Israel completely rejected Him when He came in the flesh, how much more sure should we be that He will keep His promises to us. Israel is a template for individual salvation. Just as the Lord has faithfully kept His word to them, despite their rejection of Him, He will faithfully keep His covenant with us when we fail Him. This is because He is the faithful covenant-keeping Lord. He is JESUS!

How absolutely precious it is to know that You are ever faithful to Your people, O God. When You speak, it is in absolute truth. And when You raise Your hand in a vow, nothing in all of creation can nullify Your word. Thank You for Your steadfast faithfulness to the people of Your flock. Amen.

But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. Revelation 12:14

John now continues with the thought from verse 12:6. The words closely match what is said there –

> "Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days."

What this signifies is that verses 7 through 13 were a parenthesis and now the outlying information is being returned to. Now, John begins the verse with, "But the woman." Understanding that the woman is Israel, John next says that she "was given two wings of a great eagle."

There is an article before "wings" that should be included. The Greek literally reads, "the two wings of the eagle, the great." The second article before "great" is to highlight its size. The symbolism goes back to various passages from the Old Testament, such as –

> "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself." Exodus 19:4

> "As an eagle stirs up its nest,
> Hovers over its young,
> Spreading out its wings, taking them up,
> Carrying them on its wings,
> **12** *So* the LORD alone led him,
> And *there was* no foreign god with him." Deuteronomy 32:11

In those Old Testament verses, the strength is from the Lord as He carried the people. In this verse in Revelation, the wings are given to the woman. Signifying they have been supplied with the means to carry themselves. If the eagle is the same as the Old Testament (meaning the strength of the Lord), as it should be so interpreted based on the definite article, then it is showing that these are believers in the Lord, being given His Spirit to bear them through the trial ahead. This is reflective of the words of Isaiah –

> "But those who wait on the LORD
> Shall renew *their* strength;
> They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
> They shall run and not be weary,
> They shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31

This strength of the Lord, represented by the eagle's wings, is given so "that she might fly into the wilderness to her place." This is the flight referred to by Jesus in Matthew 24–

> "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), **16** "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." Mathew 24:15, 16

The mountains of the Judean desert are a vast and mostly inhospitable wilderness. Such a wilderness in Scripture is a place of testing, but also of closeness and intimacy with the Lord when the one tested responds in accord with the will of the Lord. That is seen in the temptations of Christ where Matthew 4:1 says, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." It is to this area that the woman, meaning these of Israel who have heeded the recorded words of Christ, will flee. It will be to a place, "where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time."

The words here are a reworded repetition of what was said in verse 6 which referred to a period of "one thousand two hundred and sixty days." They are the same amount of time. A year in Scripture is three hundred and sixty days. Thus, verse six is referring to three- and one-half years. The words "a time" signify one year, "times" signifies two years, and "half a time" signifies half a year. Again, it is three- and one-half years. This shows that what is said in verses 12:7-12 were a parenthetical insert, and the narrative is returning to that of verse 12:6 now. This flight is said by John to be "from the presence of the serpent."

This is the serpent referred to in verse 12:9 (aka the dragon; the serpent; the Devil; and Satan). However, though Satan is the serpent, he is working through a human agency.

This then takes the reader back to the dragon of verse 12:3, meaning the "fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads."

Although that dragon (which is comprised of a group of nations) is not the same as the dragon of verses 7-12 (meaning Satan), the power behind it is. Satan is ultimately the leader of this multinational force. It is from that force that Israel will be kept safe and nourished.

Life application: When the people arrive at the location the Lord has chosen for them, He will nourish them for three- and one-half years. This may be a supernatural care for the people as it was during the wilderness wanderings, or it may be that there will be sympathetic people who tend to them by shipping in food, water, and whatever else is needed. Either way, God is already aware of what will occur and has shown that it will come to pass by placing it in His word. All of this will be in a place where the devil (meaning the satanically driven group of nations) will not harm them.

The analysis of the details here may not be one hundred percent right. The events are future, and one must take what is said elsewhere in Scripture and try to determine how it all fits together, but what is certain – despite the lesser details – is that the words of Jesus for Israel to flee to the mountains, and the words of Revelation now which speak of Israel being cared for in the wilderness, are speaking of the same future event.

The word has been given in advance, and when the time comes, those in Israel who believe what is recorded there will flee, just as they are instructed to do. As this is certain, then it is certain that the timeline of Daniel 9 is correct. It is also certain that the promises of the Lord from the Law of Moses, concerning Him never rejecting Israel, are reliable.

In other words, the Bible is seamlessly coming together to show us the faithfulness of God to the covenant He gave to Israel. As this is so, and as we are united to Him through faith in the New Covenant that was given in the blood of His Son, how much more should we trust His faithfulness to us! Let us never forget this. We are secure, and nothing can steal us away from Him. This is because of what He has done for us through JESUS!

Lord, for thousands of years Your care has been towards Israel. You safely led them to the land of Canaan, tended to them in Egypt, brought them again to Canaan, and gave it to them. And despite rebelling against you, You cared for them in exile and returned them both times to the land You promised on oath to them. Great is Your faithfulness to

Israel. And so, how certain we are of Your faithfulness to those who have come to You through Christ. Thank You, O God, for Your great faithfulness! Amen.

So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. Revelation 12:15

The previous verse mentioned the woman flying to a place in the wilderness where she is nourished during the second half of the tribulation period, as it says, "from the presence of the serpent." These are those of Israel who will take heed to Jesus' words of Matthew 24:15, 16. They will flee to the mountains as He instructed. For the rest of Israel, there will be consequences for not paying heed. This verse now begins with, "So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman."

The intent here is that of completely destroying Israel in order to thwart the plans of God as laid out in Scripture. This will be done through human agency. The idea of an advancing enemy being equated to a flood is recorded in Isaiah 59. That passage is referring the recorded events of the Redeemer of Zion and it is most likely anticipating this verse of Revelation –

> "So shall they fear The name of the Lord from the west, And His glory from the rising of the sun; When the enemy comes in like a flood, The Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him." Isaiah 59:19

The devil will incite a group of people to chase after the woman like a flood. This will be an attempt to destroy the remaining Jewish people of the land. But the Lord will be their Protector and Defender. For those of Israel who failed to heed Jesus' words and flee to the mountains, His words of Matthew 24 continue, saying –

> "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. **22** And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." Matthew 24:21, 22

The intent of the serpent is to totally exterminate all of Israel. That is seen in John's next words, "that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood." Being carried away by a flood means destruction. This is the intent of the serpent as he works through this army to destroy Israel. But the Lord will keep safe those who believe His word and flee to the mountains.

With this in mind, there are other interpretations given for this verse such as a literal flood of water, or a river symbolizing a flood of lies in the religions of the world which are working against God.

The first option is unlikely because God is in overall control of nature. Even though the devil is allowed to cause natural disaster elsewhere in the Bible, the passage rather supports a wave of people coming against Israel. The second option is also unlikely because of the parallels elsewhere in the Bible which match both the flood of enemies and the judgment from God.

Life application: Revelation is a book of the future. Its contents are given under inspiration, and they will come to pass. But interpreting what is stated there can be difficult simply because it is future. However, there is a likely scenario that will play out, and it is based on the words of the prophets and the words of the Lord.

The symbolism of the woman must be deemed as Israel. Any other interpretation will be faulty. Though it was hardly imaginable that Israel would once again be a nation, that is no longer the case. It is inexcusable to insert the church into the typology now that Israel is clearly understood to be a part of His end-times scenario.

From that springboard, many passages from the Old Testament suddenly come into clearer focus, and the words of Jesus concerning these events do as well. Let us trust that the God who has been so faithful to Israel will also be equally faithful to us. He is the covenant-keeping Lord. We shall be safely kept because of this. Thank God for His covenant faithfulness. Thank God for JESUS!

Lord, the devil thinks he can win against You by destroying the Jewish people and thus showing that You are unable to keep the promises of Your covenant with them. But he is mistaken and so are all the nations who rage against them. You are in complete control of all things, including the preservation of Israel. Hallelujah to You for Your faithfulness! Amen.

But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Revelation 12:16

In the previous verse, the serpent spewed water out of its mouth in order to carry the woman away by the flood. That is most probably referring to an army sent forth to destroy those of Israel who had fled to the mountains. Now, and in response to that, John says, “But the earth helped the woman.”

Quite often in Revelation, and elsewhere as well, the term "the earth" is used to speak of the inhabitants of the earth. It is a general way of expressing this idea without regard to whether the people are right with the Lord or not. This is probably the idea here. Without specifying what group or army is brought against this attacking force intent on destroying these Jews, they simply are recorded as doing so. With this probably being the case, it then says, "and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood."

The attacking army is consumed. The reason isn't given, and it could be another army is intent on destroying the attackers without regard to the safety of the Jews at all. Or it could be a purposeful battle to protect them. Either way, the result is help for the woman. And the help is effectual, thus destroying "the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth."

The purpose of this group attacking the Jews, who are ultimately serving the purposes of Satan, was to destroy Israel and thus thwart the redemptive plans of God. However, this will not come to pass, and the Jews who heeded Jesus' advice and fled to the mountains will be safe. Something like this scenario is recorded in 2 Chronicles 20. A great army was set to come against Judah. King Jehoshaphat acknowledged that they had no power to stand against the invaders. In this, their only hope was deliverance by the Lord. And the Lord delivered –

> "Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. **23** For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy *them.* And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another. **24** So when Judah came to a place overlooking the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and there *were* their dead bodies, fallen on the earth. No one had escaped." 2 Chronicles 20:22-24

An incident such as this appears to be the most likely scenario for the stopping of "the flood." However, there are other possibilities as well. In a battle found in Joshua 10, a natural event (meaning an event of nature, even if supernaturally produced) helped to destroy the enemies of Israel –

> "So the LORD routed them before Israel, killed them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, chased them along the road that goes to Beth Horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah. **11** And it happened, as they fled before Israel *and* were on the descent of Beth Horon, that the LORD cast down large

hailstones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. *There were* more who died from the hailstones than the children of Israel killed with the sword."
-Joshua 10:10, 11

Regardless as to what will actually swallow up the flood, it is recorded, and it will come to pass. Events of the past give possibilities to assure us that just as the Lord tended to Israel then, so He will do in the future. Israel will have to simply trust in the Lord. He will deliver.

Life application: Whatever is set to occur, God has a plan, and it will not be thwarted. As noted above, the earth may be representative of a protecting army, friendly to the plight of the Jews. There may be an appropriately timed earthquake that occurs at the spot where the attackers are in pursuit. Another possibility is that something like what occurred during the wilderness wanderings of Israel will happen again. During a rebellion against Moses, the main rebel and his household found out the seriousness of coming against God and His purposes –

"Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, **32** and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all *their* goods. **33** So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. **34** Then all Israel who *were* around them fled at their cry, for they said, 'Lest the earth swallow us up *also!*'" Numbers 16:31-34

Whatever is coming, it ultimately is God who is behind the deliverance of this group of fleeing Israelites. He has spoken now so that when these astonishing events occur, it will be plain, clear, and obvious that it was He who knew all along what would transpire. He is in complete control of what is coming. The Lord has spoken, and He will perform. The millennium will be ushered in, the Lord will sit and judge among His people, and the world will see the glorious splendor of Israel's Messiah. They will behold the kingdom of JESUS!

Lord, throughout the history of the world Your works have been evident. Creation testifies to You, but so does the miraculous – those things which transcend creation, and which are meant to demonstrate that You are sovereign over all things. When we see Your work in and around us, help us to acknowledge Your loving hand in it. Great and awesome are You, O God. Amen.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Revelation 12:17

Verse 12:16 showed the protection of Israel when "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.' Thus, it is revealing that the force that is coming against Israel will be thwarted. With that in mind, John next says, "And the dragon was enraged with the woman."

In the failed attempt to overwhelm and destroy Israel, this great satanically inspired coalition of nations (see comments on Revelation 12:3) led by the antichrist will be furious. But without the power to accomplish this, it will direct its fury elsewhere. How this comes about will continue in the chapters ahead, but for now, John continues with, "and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring."

The fury of this body will be directed toward those who have understood the importance of Israel in the end times scenario, supporting its right to exist. Thus, they are called "her offspring." The male Child is Jesus. Therefore, it can logically be stated that the woman's offspring here are those who are akin to Jesus through faith. As it says in Hebrews 2:11, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren."

John then goes on to confirm this, saying that they are those "who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." The words, "the commandments of God," are not referring to the Law of Moses. That is set aside through the work of Christ. This is evidenced in verses such as 1 Corinthians 7:19 –

> "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters.*"

Circumcision is a precept mandated in the Law of Moses, and yet Paul says that in Christ circumcision is not a consideration. Therefore, he cannot be referring to the Law of Moses when he says, "keeping the commandments of God." Rather, this is referring to faith in Christ. As this is so, then it is evident that John is now using parallelism in this verse in Revelation by equating keeping the commandments with having "the testimony of Jesus Christ."

The antichrist will seek to destroy any believers because of their faith in Christ. That faith will lead to their support for the cause of Israel in the end times.

The sentiment of this verse is seen in Daniel 11. Towards the end of that chapter comes a passage that has clearly been understood to be referring to the antichrist of the end times. There, Daniel says –

> "At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm *them,* and pass through. **41** He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many *countries* shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon. **42** He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. **43** He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians *shall follow* at his heels. **44** But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. **45** And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him." Daniel 11:40-44

Though what is recorded in these verses from Daniel are written in a single paragraph, they will span quite a bit of time. These are certainly the events being relayed by John now. In the coming pages of Revelation, the details will be filled in, but they correspond to what then begins Daniel 12 –

> "At that time Michael shall stand up,
> The great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people;
> And there shall be a time of trouble,
> Such as never was since there was a nation,
> *Even* to that time.
> And at that time your people shall be delivered,
> Every one who is found written in the book.
> **2** And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
> Some to everlasting life,
> Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.
> **3** Those who are wise shall shine
> Like the brightness of the firmament,
> And those who turn many to righteousness
> Like the stars forever and ever." Daniel 12:1-3

Life application: The message of the two witnesses of chapter 11 will have gone out to the post-rapture world and a great multitude will believe. They will accept Jesus Christ and will not bend the knee to the global system that has been developed.

In the chapters ahead, the penalty for rejecting this global system will be seen. There will be war against the saints because they will not accept being part of this system. The commandments of God are centered on faith in Jesus. It is this faith that cannot be tolerated by the world of wickedness that seeks to rule apart from God. This was the case before the Flood of Noah, and it has been repeated throughout the ages. But for those who hold fast to their faith, there will be great rewards.

The beautiful part of Scripture is that there is no time that God's mercy is not seen, even after the rapture, many will come to faith in Christ and be saved. This is because of the love of God which is found in the giving of His Son. Such is the love of God as is found in JESUS.

Lord God, You have called us to faith and promised us rewards for that faith. In this world, it can mean trials, troubles, and difficulties, but it is worth it! The promise of life to come far outweighs the short-term gains of this temporary walk. Help us to keep our priorities straight and to focus on You every moment we walk upon this world. Amen.

CHAPTER 13

Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Revelation 13:1

There is a variation between manuscripts to start Chapter 13. Some say, "Then he stood." That would be speaking of the dragon (Satan) of verse 12:17. Others say, "Then I stood." That would be referring to John as he continues with the visions he is witnessing. Regardless of which is correct, the narrative continues without any damage to the surrounding verses.

What is of note is that the vision that opens Chapter 14 has the Lamb standing on Mt. Zion. That is certainly a sure foundation which is to be distinguished from the sand of the sea which changes with the tides. With that thought in mind, John says, "And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea."

This is similar to a vision seen by Daniel –

> "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea." Daniel 7:2

The sea is representative of the nations of the world. In their stirring up, it reflects the changing nature of the empires of the world. In particular, it is dealing with those empires that have an impact on Israel. Countless other empires have come and gone, but they didn't have any relevant effect on Israel. Because of this, they are left out of the biblical narrative.

In these words, Revelation 13 corresponds to the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The thirteenth letter, mem, pictures water, and it signifies "water," "chaos," "mighty," and "blood." In this chapter is found the beast rising out of the sea, the waters of chaos.

From this sea of peoples forming new alliances and governments out of the people of the world, John says the one rising up is "having seven heads and ten horns."

The symbolism is the same as that of the dragon in Revelation 12. There are heads, probably representing individual nations. There are horns, probably representing powerful leaders. Next, John notes that on his horns ten crowns. As seen in Chapter 12,

diadems probably reflect kingdoms or nations under a single leader's rule. The actual interpretation of the heads, horns, and crowns will be evident when the time comes. For now, these meanings are simply best guesses. John finishes the description with, "and on his heads a blasphemous name."

In this, there are now several differences from the fiery red dragon of Revelation 12.

In Chapter 12, the beast is seen as a sign in heaven rather than a beast rising out of the sea. The color in Chapter 12 is defined as a fiery red dragon. This is unstated in Chapter 13. In Chapter 12, the dragon has seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems. The beast of Chapter 13 has seven heads, ten horns, and ten crowns (Greek: *diadéma*– the same word as in Chapter 12). Now in Chapter 13, a final variation is that on the heads are a blasphemous name.

With these words, there is another variation in manuscripts. Some say, "a blasphemous name." Others say, "blasphemous names." The difference is important, but until the beast is revealed, it is unknown which is correct. Either each head has a different blasphemous name on it, or all of the heads have one blasphemous name on them.

Concerning the similarities and differences to the fourth beast in Daniel 7, the final empire of Daniel's vision is identified as the Roman Empire. This was an early fulfillment of the prophecy at the time of the destruction of Israel in AD70. However, what appears to be the case is that this same beast will be revived in the end times to become the dominant power in the world.

This has actually been coming to fulfillment in modern times as the EU has risen and is going through its process of solidification. Numerous events have occurred in Greece, Spain, the UK, and elsewhere in this alliance (as a great sea being stirred up). These events are molding it to become the revived empire which finds its roots in the Roman empire that existed so long ago. It is this beast that will usher in the anti-Christ as is noted in Daniel 9:27.

As far as the name (or names) of blasphemy, the word indicates something that occurs against God. And so, whatever this name is, which John hasn't disclosed, it is something that indicates this beast is supposedly the spiritual banner of the earth. As such, it is taking the place of God. This beast will be located in Rome where the Vatican now stands. This political/religious system will be centered on this area (as will be clearly noted in verses to come).

Life application: The events described here are future, and they are vague enough to keep us from seeing exactly what is coming, but they are precise enough so that when they do come about, there will be no doubt as to what is being referred to. What is certain is that the beasts being described in Scripture are always those that have an impact on Israel. This alone is an indication that God still has plans for the people and the nation. He has not forsaken His promises, and their lack of faithfulness in no way negates His faithfulness.

The word is written, the Lord has spoken, and Israel will again be the central focus of the biblical narrative. For that to happen, the church will first be taken out of the picture. This is the great hope of believers. Someday the Lord will come for His church. Someday, hopefully soon, we shall be with JESUS!

Lord, after the rapture, it is evident that the world will be lined up exactly as Your word says. It will be in a way that is opposed to You and Your gospel message, and yet it will be what the world thinks is correct. Such is the way of false religion, hiding the truth behind blasphemous falsities. Help us to get the word out now about this coming apostasy so that people will know the truth. Amen.

Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet* of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. Revelation 13:2

John now takes time to further describe the beast that has risen out of the sea. He does so using apocalyptic imagery seen especially in the book of Daniel. He begins with, "Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard."

In Daniel 7, a succession of beasts was viewed, representing a succession of world empires that would arise. The third of those beasts, one like a leopard and representing the Greek empire, partially matches what is written in Revelation 13:2.

> "After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it."
> -Daniel 7:6

John next continues with his description, saying, "his feet were like the feet of a bear." This somewhat matches the second beast, one like a bear and representing the Medo-Persian empire, in Daniel 7 –

> "And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and *had* three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!'" Daniel 7:5

John's vision continues with, "and his mouth like the mouth of a lion." And, again, this partially corresponds to the first beast, one like a lion and representing Babylon, of Daniel 7 –

> "The first *was* like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it." Daniel 7:4

In Daniel's vision, after these three beasts, there came a fourth terrifying beast which represented the Roman Empire. What is possible is that this future beast being described by John will be a conglomeration of all of these previous empires – a world power which will unite into one terrible whole, centered in Rome.

Or, possibly, the various descriptions of the beast match what this future empire will be like. It will be fast and efficient like a leopard. The empire will be firm and strong like a bear, and it will be boisterous in its attitude like a lion. As it is future, it is hard to be dogmatic. But the symbolism will be perfectly understood once the beast arises. Something similar to what is seen here is described in the book of Hosea –

> "So I will be to them like a lion;
> Like a leopard by the road I will lurk;
> **8** I will meet them like a bear deprived *of her cubs;*
> I will tear open their rib cage,
> And there I will devour them like a lion.
> The wild beast shall tear them." Hosea 13:7, 8

The Lord, who is speaking here, may be describing an enemy that he uses to refine and judge Israel. If this is so, Hosea is describing a time of war against the disobedient in Israel. When this period is over, the Lord will have purged them of their wicked ways and will have refined them in the fire of the tribulation. Only after this time of great turmoil and anguish will the Lord return and bring peace to the earth.

This beast then is not an individual, but it will certainly be led by an individual – the antichrist. This is reflected in the next words from John. He says, "The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority." The dragon is Satan, and the beast will be ruled by a leader filled with the power of Satan. He is the lawless one spoken of by Paul

in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. This wicked ruler will be filled with all of the power of Satan and he will unleash immense destruction upon the world. His seat of power will be one of terror and brutality.

Life application: There is enough information about the beast being described by John to give us clues into what it will be like, or of whom it will be comprised, but not enough to definitively reveal everything about it. Once the beast comes on the scene, however, it will be evident to those who are attentive to the prophecy.

One of the constant worries of people concerning these visions is that they will have to endure through the tribulation, and they will have to face what is being described here. For the believer in Christ, this is incorrect. The timeline of the events concerning the church is clear. Those who have put their faith in Christ will be taken at the rapture of the church, prior to the events now being described. Have faith. Trust the word as it is given, and hold fast to the promises of God which come because of the wonderful work of JESUS.

Lord God, when we as humans don't bend our knee to You, the only other place for us to turn to is wickedness and destruction. Help us to continually keep our eyes, our hearts, and our thoughts on You. Help us to bring others to a saving knowledge of You and Your great deeds. There is a day coming when this won't be possible, so stir our hearts now. Amen.

And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. Revelation 13:3

John continues with the symbolism of the beast rising out of the sea mentioned in verse 1. Of it, he now says, "And I saw one of his heads." In verse 1, the beast was described as "having seven heads and ten horns, and on its horns, ten crowns."

In Revelation 12:3, the beast was described as "a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads." At that time, the analysis of its meaning was –

> A great, fiery red dragon – An entity filled with satanic influence, bent on war.
> Having seven heads – Comprised of seven distinct nations.
> And ten horns – Under the authority of ten powerful rulers.
> And seven diadems on his heads – Seven of the entities are kingdoms or nations under a single leader rule.

If the symbolism is consistent in this verse, the "head" now being mentioned in Chapter 13 is not a person at all. Rather, it is a nation. The horns are kings or powerful rulers (see Revelation 17:12, for example). Of this head John is now describing, he says it is "as if it had been mortally wounded."

The head receives a blow, thought to be fatal. The same word used here was used of the Lamb that was slain in verse 5:6. The head that is slain here is obviously being set in contrast, and yet in comparison to, the Lamb. The Lamb was as if slain and yet He lives. The head of this beast is as if slain, and yet, "his deadly wound was healed."

The Greek of these words says, "the wound of death of it was healed." What is being conveyed is that the head of this beast suffered such a catastrophic blow that it appeared it was finished, and yet it miraculously came back to life. So great is the event that John says, "And all the world marveled and followed the beast."

When the word "all" is used, it is normally stated as a superlative. For example, at the announcement of the birth of Christ, it says in Matthew 2:3, "When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." This does not mean that every single person in Jerusalem heard the news and was troubled. It means that the attitude was pervasive.

With this understanding, the likely analysis is that there is a coalition of nations rising out of the "great sea" of humanity that will have the form and structure described in Revelation. One of the nations will have a seemingly terminal blow to it. However, that nation will resurrect and become a wonder for the world to follow after.

The general analysis of most scholars is that this will be a person who is mortally struck and comes back to life in a manner similar to Christ. Another, and more likely, possibility is that this is referring to a nation or governmental body that comes back from a seemingly mortal wound.

<u>Life application:</u> As noted, the general thought concerning this verse is that this "head" is speaking of an actual leader of the beast rather than a leading body. In other words, it is generally taught that this is a type of "false resurrection" of an individual who is mortally hurt.

However, the seemingly mortal wound (in a figurative sense) to one of the leading bodies, instead of a single leader, seems more plausible. To give an example, if the EU were this beast (speculation!), what is being stated here could be logically described as an alliance of nations. It has and it continues to go through great financial troubles. If

one of its “heads,” meaning a nation within the EU, were to receive a mortal wound – a financial disaster so bad that it would seem impossible to overcome – and yet it was to be “healed” to a financially secure position, the world would marvel at the ability of the beast (the EU) to cure its wound, and would follow it in its financial dealings.

The same logic could be used militarily. If a nation within a corporate body of nations was facing complete defeat, and yet it overcame the defeat, the world would marvel at what occurred and follow after the beast. This second type of calamity, of certain defeat being turned into victory during conflict, is a likely scenario because of what is said in the verses ahead.

A person receiving a life-threatening (and even mortal) wound to the head, which is then miraculously healed, may be sensational and exciting, but it certainly wouldn’t cause the world to follow after him. Modern medicine is to the point where this type of thing is common. Although people are always impressed with a person’s ability to overcome such a trial, no one follows after such an occurrence as if they were indestructible.

A great modern-day equivalent is when US Rep. Gabrielle Giffords was shot. She certainly fits the description, but other than being proud of her stamina, no one hailed her as a great and powerful warrior worthy of following. Therefore, the reasonable analysis of this verse is not speaking of an individual, but a corporate body that overcomes certain financial or military defeat to become a force to be reckoned with once again.

In the end, we can only look forward and do our best to try to determine what is being said. But the main point of the analysis is to see what is coming and to know that God already knows the end. Because of this, we would be wise to call out now for His offer of peace and reconciliation. In the terrible times ahead, difficult choices will have to be made. For us now, let us make the right choice. Let us secure our eternal destiny by calling out to JESUS.

Lord God, it is great to look into Your word and draw out from it what You intend for us to see. At times, such as in future prophecy, we can’t be certain about what is being said, but when the event does occur, we are left with no doubt. Thank You for allowing us to analyze these things this way in order to find the true meaning and then wait on its fulfillment. In the end, Your word will be proven true. Amen.

So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"
Revelation 13:4

The beast rising out of the sea was introduced in 13:1. In 13:3, it was noted that one of its heads had been mortally wounded, and yet it was healed. With that noted, John then said, "And all the world marveled and followed the beast."

As was stated then, this is most probably referring to a nation that suffered such a crushing defeat financially, militarily, or so on. So great was the defeat that it seemed it could not ever recover, and yet it did. It was as if it was resurrected to life. In this event, the whole world marveled after it.

This is not out of the realm of possibility. Germany was utterly crushed in the first world war, and yet they came back as a massive force within a short time. This incredible revival came to pass, and the world marveled at it. The head of this beast is miraculously healed, and John says, "So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast."

The beast is the end-times alliance of nations described in 13:1, 2. Satan will be the force behind it, and the antichrist will be the main leader of it. Just as those who followed Hitler glorified the greatness of the empire, casting their allegiance to the satanic power behind it, so will be the case with those who follow after this beast. As it next says, "and they worshiped the beast."

Humans are prone to worshiping powerful governments. They worshiped and followed Nazi Germany, they worshiped and followed communist regimes, and they have worshiped and followed nations like the UK and the USA. When a nation is powerful, it becomes a source of idol worship. Such an instance will be true with this end times alliance. The people will be saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

It has been the constant call of humanity for whatever great nation or alliance that has existed. It is true of the USA today. Someday, it will be true of this beast of the end times. So great will be its power that people who follow it will consider it a force above all others.

<u>Life application:</u> At times in the Old Testament, the question is raised, "Who is like the Lord?" One such example is found in Exodus 15:11 –

"Who *is* like You, O LORD, among the gods?
Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness,
Fearful in praises, doing wonders?

There is but one God. We don't need the Bible to be able to figure that out, however, the Bible reveals this one God to us. He is the Creator of all things. The earth is like an insignificant grain of dust in the vastness of the cosmos, and yet it is more of creation than any other being has ever created – because a created being can't create anything.

Despite this, the people of the world will see the beast's power and decide that it is worth worshiping. When they do this, they are actually worshiping the devil who gave the beast its power in the first place. This is the nature of all false religions. They either directly or indirectly worship Satan, because anything that doesn't worship God – as He has revealed Himself – is wrongly directed worship.

With this in mind, John – in his first epistle – gives the main reason that Jesus came. Every other reason mentioned in Scripture for Jesus' coming is tied up in this final concept – "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

This is obviously not a popular concept with people who don't align themselves with the Christian message, but either it is true, or it is not true. If it isn't, then Jesus' ministry was a waste of time, and He died for no reason at all. But the truth of John's statement assures us that the whole world is under the sway of the devil. It is Jesus alone who can change that.

Calling on Jesus is the most important choice anyone can ever make. Be sure to do the research, consider what God has done, and then make the smart choice. Call out to God through His Christ. Call out to Him through JESUS.

Lord God, we wonder how anyone could be so hugely stupid as to worship the devil? But when we realize that this is the default position of all people, it no longer seems so silly. Instead, it shows us the enormity of what Jesus has done and the great work He accomplished for us. He alone can lead us back to You. Thank You, O God, for Jesus. Amen.

And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Revelation 13:5

The words of this verse are referring to the beast of the previous verse. It was asked, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" The world will look to this great power and follow after it because of its great authority. A great power is generally noted as such because of a great leader. This is not always the case. For example, the United States has been considered a great power even with really crummy leaders.

However, at times, a nation or group of nations is thought as great because of its leader. Such was the case with Nazi Germany. One can hardly think of it without also associating it with Hitler. In the case of this great end-times beast, it too will be great, but it will have a leader that will be the focus of it. Its power will be wielded by him. And more, John says of the beast, "And he was given a mouth speaking great things."

This is a reference to what is said in Daniel 7:8 –

> "I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words."

The term "pompous words" is literally translated from the Aramaic "great *things*." This end-times leader will be charismatic and able to utter words to convince all of his own greatness, and that the power he yields is without match. John also says, "and blasphemies."

This indicates that this ruler (the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians 2:3), who is the antichrist, will speak against God. He will claim that it is he who is the savior of the world. Paul clearly states this of him in 2 Thessalonians. He says it is he "who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." Understanding this, John next says, "and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months."

The words, "and he was given," speak of allowance. In other words, he only has what he has received, and he has received only because God has allowed it to be so. Recorded millennia ago, the prophecies of Daniel 9 foretold these events would come, and that they will occur in connection with the presence of this man of sin. Paul then gives more details for the world to understand who he would be and what the state of the world will be like. After that, John has confirmed the allowed span of time saying that his authority will continue for forty-two months.

This is exactly what the first half of Daniel 9:27 said would occur –

"Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
But in the middle of the week
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering."

A week here means seven years. Seven years are granted, but at the halfway mark of those seven years, this antichrist will sit "as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." One-half of seven years is forty-two months. The timeline has been given, the details have been explained, and John confirms the overall scenario for the end times once again in Revelation.

This is the time of disaster that Jesus spoke of for the Jews of the end times. Everything needed to understand the scenario has been given. If they will pay heed, they will be prepared to make their flight into the mountains.

Life application: The words of Daniel 9 are directed to the people of Israel. Jesus was speaking to the people of Israel when He referred to these coming events in the synoptic gospels. Paul's timeline clearly shows that the church will not be present when these events occur. And John's words now in Revelation fully support the notion that the main events of Revelation are focused on the nation of Israel.

For those who believe the church has replaced Israel, there is a sad disconnect between their understanding the covenants and of the faithfulness of the Lord in relation to those covenants. It is no wonder pastors and preachers teach that one can lose his salvation. If covenant faithfulness is up to us, such would be the case. But it is not. When the Lord speaks, He will be faithful, even when those He covenants with are unfaithful.

Have faith in the promises of the Lord, even when you fail Him. He has been faithful to unfaithful Israel for millennia, and He will be faithful to see you through the end that He agreed to when you received His offer of pardon and peace. That was the day you received JESUS.

Lord God, thank You for our hope. Thank You for the giving of Your Son so that we have full, final, and forever restoration with You because of Him. We thank You and praise You for our Lord and Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. Revelation 13:6

There are a couple of variations in source texts for this verse. One is that the word "blasphemy" is plural in some of them. The other is that the word "and" is not included in the final clause. Thus, it would say –

> "And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven." NASB 1977

This would make the final clause an explanation of the previous clauses rather than a second category.

Concerning the words of the verse as rendered by the NKJV, the conduct of the antichrist referred to in the previous verse is now detailed. Of him, John says, "Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God."

The antichrist, who speaks for the great beast of verse 13:1, will openly defy the true God through his blasphemies. This is a railing against the God who is revealed in nature as Paul proclaims in Romans 1. His attacks will defame the character of the Creator – His grace, mercy, truth, love, righteousness, holiness, justice, and so forth. He will proclaim that which is contrary to these eternal and unchanging standards.

Only God, as revealed in the Bible, can truly be God, because only He can atone for sins as was accomplished through Jesus Christ. Any other "god," made up by man, will compromise at least one of these unchanging attributes, thus proving he is not God at all. Only the Creator, through Jesus, is both Just and the Justifier of the people of the world.

To speak against the true God is to speak blasphemy against Him. But the antichrist will go further and also "blaspheme His name." This is a direct attack against the very nature of who God is, because God's name is a self-revelation of His eternal and unchanging character. When God spoke to Moses, "I AM who I AM," He was stating that He is – without change of any kind. He is the self-existent, timeless, perfect God from whom creation finds its source and its continuation because the created order came from nothing by His spoken word.

But more, this certainly means that He will speak against the name of Jesus, the full and perfect expression of who God is, as He has revealed Himself within the stream of time and human existence. Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) means "Salvation." The antichrist will certainly proclaim that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:4) and claim that he, rather than Jesus, is the way of salvation. He may do this by jointly denying all religions, or he may

do it by speaking out against the exclusivity of the Christian gospel. Either way, it is certain that he will deny the premise of Christianity.

The antichrist will also blaspheme "His tabernacle." This is a specific and direct reference to the Person of Jesus Christ. The word "tabernacle" means the place where God dwells. In John 1:14, we read, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In this verse, a literal translation of "dwelt" would be "tabernacled."

God's true tabernacle is the Person of Jesus. Jesus is the One who reveals the unseen Father to us, and He is the One through whom we receive the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to blaspheme God's tabernacle is to defame the Person and the work of Jesus Christ – speaking against His atonement, His all-sufficiency, and that He is the only way to be restored to God – His exclusivity. Instead, the antichrist will proclaim falsities about these things in order to establish his own supposed avenue to heaven.

Finally, the verse says he will blaspheme "those who dwell in heaven." As noted above, if this is an explanation of the previous clauses, it simply reaffirms what they have already stated. He is speaking blasphemy against God, His name, and His tabernacle. If this is another category, it would refer to the entire heavenly host – from the highest archangel to the last saint taken to glory. All who are in heaven stand sinless before God because of the work of Jesus Christ – either directly, such as the angels who were created by Him and who never sinned, or the humans redeemed by His atoning sacrifice, having their sins washed by His precious blood.

If the latter, the antichrist will make claims that what occurred in these people wasn't of any value and that Christians aren't the people of God. His claims will be very similar to those of cults, false religions, and even liberal "Christians" of today. Anyone who denies the fundamental tenets of the faith, and the work of Jesus Christ in its fullness, is already of the spirit of the antichrist as stated by John in His first epistle (1 John 2:18).

This person in Revelation will be the ultimate example of such a person, having been filled by the power of Satan. His blasphemies will be great.

<u>Life application:</u> Among other things, the Bible is a message to the people of the world about God. It reveals who He is, what He is like, and how to have a personal, restored, relationship with Him. This message of restoration, however, is one of absolute exclusivity. There is one way, and one way alone, for the people of the world to be reconciled to Him. Before the coming of Christ, it was faith in God's promise of a coming

Messiah. Since the coming of Christ, it remains faith – but it is properly directed faith in the Messiah who has come.

There is this one path to salvation, and it comes by one means only – faith in what God has done in the giving of His Son. Have faith. Call on God's Messiah today. Call on JESUS.

Heavenly Father, it is beyond comprehension how merciful and patient You are. You allow us to strive against You, speak against You, and bring great blasphemies against You, and yet You don't destroy us. Your patience is incredible as You wait for us to turn and call out to You. Thank You for Your mercy on those of us who have acted this way in the past but who have now had a change in heart. Thank You for the forgiveness that comes through faith in Jesus. Amen.

It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. Revelation 13:7

The words refer to the beast rising out of the sea (13:1). It will be a beast led by the antichrist. It was said in verse 13:5 that he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies. Now, it says, "It was granted to him to make war with the saints."

This same satanic power, given to him to speak great things, is also behind his desire and ability to destroy the saints. This is a reference to the words of Daniel 7:21 –

> "I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them."

The horn of Daniel 7 refers to the antichrist now being described again in Revelation. He will be the leader of the beast. The saints are any who are believers in Christ. They are those that will make up the great white robed multitude referred to in Revelation 7 –

> "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" Revelation 7:9, 10

They will understand who Christ is after the rapture has taken place, they will put their trust in Him, and they will refuse to be a part of the global system that is set up. The antichrist will have the power to come against them, "and to overcome them."

It is exactly what Daniel prophesied with the words, “making war against the saints, and prevailing against them.” The powers he will wield will stretch around the globe, and there will be no place safe to hide. John confirms this thought with the words, “And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.”

Some manuscripts add in the words “and people.” Either way, the extent of his rule over the planet will be complete. The term used here expresses that all humanity will fall under his authority. What John is saying was also stated in Daniel 7 –

> “He shall speak *pompous* words against the Most High,
> Shall persecute the saints of the Most High,
> And shall intend to change times and law.
> Then *the saints* shall be given into his hand
> For a time and times and half a time.” Daniel 7:25

Since the time of the Tower of Babel, the population of the world has never been united in such a way as will occur under his rule. The only ones who will not comply with his authority will be those who have a higher allegiance, meaning they have bowed the knee to Christ alone.

Life application: In the last three- and one-half years of the tribulation period, the antichrist will be “granted” the ability to come against the saints and to overcome them. This wicked person has no true power or authority of his own. He is working on behalf of Satan, and even Satan is bound to what the Lord will allow – something we learn from the first chapter of the book of Job.

Just because the antichrist has been granted authority to make war against these people and to “overcome them,” it doesn’t mean he has any true authority over them. Rather, Jesus holds their eternal destiny in His powerful grasp. Death for them is only temporary. At the end of the tribulation, they will be raised to eternal life.

The rest of the world will be under the authority of the antichrist, and they will pay for it with eternal consequences. There is a difference – some will die and receive eternal rewards, while others will die and receive eternal condemnation. Jesus is the key to both – either accepting Him or rejecting Him is the most important decision anyone can ever make. Be sure to call out for salvation today. Be sure to call out for JESUS!

Lord, the blessing of dying peacefully in this life is of no value at all when compared to the eternal blessing of being saved by the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Help us to get

our priorities right, and give us the courage and strength to use this life for Your glory, even if it means death for Your name's sake. Amen.

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Revelation 13:8

This continues to refer to the beast rising out of the sea mentioned in verse 13:1. It is an entity led by the antichrist. Of this beast, John now writes, "All who dwell on the earth will worship him." The authority and scope of rule of this entity will presumably cover the entire planet. As of today, independent nations follow their own paths, and they connect to, or disconnect from, other nations as they see fit.

However, at the time of this beast, nations will become a part of this main leadership whether they like it or not. It is certain that some will participate even if they don't agree with the overall direction of authority because Jesus speaks of separating the sheep from the goats after this time of tribulation is over. Matthew 25:32 shows that these terms are not referring to individuals, but to nations. The nations will become a part of this ruling system.

A good example of what will occur might be the nations subdued by Nazi Germany. They became a part of the alliance, but they also remained sovereign nations and often had underground fighters working against the Nazis. However, an outward allegiance to the Nazis was professed by those in leadership. This may be a similar scenario as to what lies ahead. As John says, "whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

It should be noted that the words "from the foundation of the earth" could be referring to either "Book of Life" or "Lamb slain." If the former, it would agree with Peter's words–

> "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. **20** He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." 1 Peter 1:19, 20

If it refers to the book, it would correspond to Revelation 17:8 –

> "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."

In the end, both are true. Christ was ordained from before the foundation of the world, and God also knew before the foundation of the world who would believe and be saved. With that understanding, the Bible is making both explicitly clear, that God is omniscient. As this is so, all will come out exactly as His word is written, and we have no worry that things today, or into the future, are somehow out of control.

Christ was ordained to die for our sin, He has died for our sin, and therefore our sin is atoned for in Him. As this is so, we are forever free from condemnation. This is true with any who believe. Even in the tribulation period, God knows who are His and who are not.

Life application: There is an important lesson to remember in this verse – "Not every 'every' in the Bible means every, and not all 'all's' in the Bible mean all." In other words, it is important to take seemingly absolute claims in context. A good example is Matthew 2:3 –

> "When Herod the king heard *this,* he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

Obviously, from the context of this verse, it is speaking of the general leadership of Jerusalem. At the time of the announcement of Jesus' birth, probably very few in Jerusalem had heard a thing, and they went about their lives untroubled by the events that occurred in the king's palace.

In Revelation 13:8, the words "all who dwell on the earth" refer to the vast majority who will worship the great beast – not every person. How can we know this? Because the previous verse says that "it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them." There can't be a war with the saints unless there are saints to make war with.

These saints will be a part of this battle, even until the return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. For those who are not saints, meaning those "whose names have not been written in the Book of Life" there will be a casting away of the truth of the Creator to follow the beast, headed by the antichrist.

Because the power of the antichrist comes from the devil, these people will actually be worshiping and giving allegiance to Satan. This is the state of the world even today. All false religions are of the devil. The tribulation period will merely magnify this rebelling against "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

The amazing truth of this verse, a verse which must be carefully contemplated, is that even before the world was created, God knew that His Son would have to go to the cross and die to pay our sin debt. Because this is so, the willful rejection of Him can only lead to one thing – eternal separation from God and being cast into the Lake of Fire.

God has shown us what is right and how to obtain eternal life. We reject this at our own destruction. Be wise and discerning. Call out today to God for salvation. Call out for His provision as is found only in JESUS.

O God, it is simply beyond our ability to fully comprehend, even though we know it is true –before You created a single thing, You knew what would have to happen – that Your Own Son would need to die for the sins of the people not yet created. And yet You created us anyway. What a wonderful love You have expressed for the work of Your hands, even your wayward children. May all come to realize this, and may all hail the name of Jesus! Amen.

If anyone has an ear, let him hear. Revelation 13:9

The words resemble those found in the seven letters to the seven churches. Towards the end of each of those letters, the Lord would give this as a note calling for heightened attention. The idea of "If anyone has an ear" is that of understanding. The idea of "let him hear" is that of following through in proper compliance to that which is spoken.

In this case, scholars are divided as to whether the paying heed is referring to what has just been said about the beast and the persecution of the saints who do not worship the beast, or if it is referring to the coming verse that calls for "the patience and the faith of the saints." The answer is that it is both. The entire passage is carefully aligned so that it requires special attention.

Life application: In Deuteronomy 4:9, 10, it says –

> "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, **10** *especially concerning* the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and *that* they may teach their children.'"

In those verses is the admonition that the people are told to "let them hear My words." The Lord is speaking to His people and asking them to listen and apply the words to their lives. And then Jesus finally came, about fifteen hundred years later, and walked among the people of Israel.

Eight times the gospels record Jesus' words, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" These eight times are Matthew 11:15, 13:9, 13:43, Mark 4:9, 4:23, 7:17, Luke 8:8, & 14:35. In Revelation, this phrase is also repeated eight times – 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22, and 13:9.

Revelation 13:9 is now the last time it is found in the Bible. It is a final note of warning to the people of the world, and it will call for true and steadfast hearts, willing to heed the words from the mouth of the Creator.

The finishing of the thought will come in the next verse. God is instructing the people who will live in this terrible time of tribulation. By far the best option is to get right with Jesus now and avoid the trials, the woes, and the tests to come. Bow the knee to Jesus, call on Him now, and be ready for the rapture. The time of that event is unknown, but it will come to pass. He is coming for His people. He is JESUS!

Heavenly Father, since the earliest days of man on earth, You have given Your word and asked us to hear it and apply it to our lives. However, we are so determined to do it our own way. Certainly, You give us such instruction so that we may live and enjoy life, but we continuously reject it for temporary pleasure. Help us to get it right; help us to follow Your word of life. Amen.

He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. Revelation 13:10

The first clause varies in some Greek texts, changing the meaning a bit –

> "He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity."
> "If anyone is to be taken captive, into captivity he goes."

The first of these makes both clauses follow the same idea, revealing an action based on an action. The person who does a certain action will have that action brought against him.

The second then reveals an action based upon destiny's hand. The person who is destined for a certain action cannot escape that fate.

As the final fate of both options is the same, that of captivity, it is a note that this lies ahead for some. Thus, Jesus' words of the previous verse are to be remembered: "If anyone has an ear, let him hear." Assuming the first is correct, simply for the purpose of analysis, it bears the same general thought as that found in Jeremiah 15. Prior to the Babylonian captivity, the people of Judah were told that they were destined for trouble because of their unfaithfulness. The Lord said to Jeremiah that if the people asked where they should go, his answer to them was to be abrupt, concise, and lacking hope –

> "And it shall be, if they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you shall tell them, "Thus says the LORD:
> 'Such as *are* for death, to death;
> And such as *are* for the sword, to the sword;
> And such as *are* for the famine, to the famine;
> And such as *are* for the captivity, to the captivity.'" Jeremiah 15:2

Therefore, the first translation option noted above is probably what is being referred to, and is based on this Old Testament source. It is further reflected in Jeremiah 43:11 –

> "When he comes, he shall strike the land of Egypt *and deliver* to death *those appointed* for death, and to captivity *those appointed* for captivity, and to the sword *those appointed* for the sword."

In war, there are casualties. This is the expectation, and they may be sinners or saints. When the enemy comes through, he will not stop to determine which. Thus, the saints must be as ready to be taken captive as the sinner. John next says, "he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword."

This is a clear reference to Jesus' words of Matthew 26:52 –

> "But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

It is a general truth that people who live in a certain way will find the same treatment dealt to them that they brought upon others. A person who constantly sues others will find himself being sued. A person who is a soldier will probably die in battle. A man of blood will die a bloody death.

Thus, the warning for the future is that tough times are ahead. The fate of time and circumstance will come upon people based on where they are at any given moment,

and those who engage in battle during that time are bound to die in the battle. With this in mind, John then writes, “Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.”

The word “here” is emphatic, meaning that this is the promise which should help them to endure the trials and death they will face. “Here – rest in this faithful soul; your reward is coming.”

The warning has been given in advance. The saints of the Tribulation period will not be immune from the terrible times that lie ahead. They will face captivity, and they will face death. But in persevering, they will be saved. As Jesus says, “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” Christ is looking for faith among those who say they are His. In this time of fiery trial, those who are not of faith will be weeded out.

Life application: This verse is actually a verse of hope. The saints of the tribulation period will fall by the sword and be martyred in an amazingly vast number – all because they refuse to bow the knee to the antichrist. But in holding on to their faith, they shall be saved. The Lord will remember them.

Those who hold fast to Jesus will be granted eternal life, and the wrongs done to them will be made right. However, for those who follow the antichrist, there will only be eternal damnation. The Lord will be their Judge, and He will do so impartially, and with swiftness. But before that happens, the redemptive narrative must run its course. Because of this, and knowing the terrible times that lie ahead, wouldn’t it be better to be right with the Lord now.

Today is the day of salvation. We do not know what tomorrow holds. Call out to God now and be reconciled to Him through the Gift of His Son. Call out to God through JESUS.

Lord, even now in this time of peace and abundance, our lives often seem difficult and filled with trials. At times, we take our eyes off the fact that You have already written Your word and that it will surely come to pass exactly as promised. Help us to remember this as we face our daily troubles. Give us that peace that surpasses all understanding. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. Revelation 13:11

In verse 13:1, a beast rose out of the sea. That was symbolic of an alliance of nations arising out of the chaos of the nations of the world. Now, another beast arises out of the earth. As John says, “Then I saw another beast coming out of the earth.”

It has already been noted that the word “earth” is a general term. It can speak of the inhabitants of the earth, the actual earth upon which we stand, a particular region of the earth (such as “the land of Israel”), and so on. The first beast is spoken of without the second beast at times, but this second beast is never seen apart from the first beast.

This second beast, meaning its leader, has been equated by some with the False Prophet of Revelation 16:13. If so, that may speak of a religious rule of the beast, just as the antichrist will rule over the first beast. Of this beast, John notes, “and he had two horns like a lamb.” Horns are a symbol of power and authority. Being like a lamb, these two leaders will appear to be mild and gentle. If the “earth” is referring to the land of Israel, the beast is an organizational structure that appears to have the best intent of the people in mind. One horn could be the high priest of the reestablished temple service, for example. Or this could be a global religious system as well. It all depends on what the term “earth” is referring to here.

However, John next notes, “and spoke like a dragon.” The beast will give the impression that its actions are caring, loving, and with completely good intentions, but as it directs its actions verbally, its true source of power will be revealed – it is speaking on behalf of the devil.

A couple possibilities are:

- This is referring to a religious body, or at least one horn of it is religious in nature. It is one that is working in harmony with the alliance led by the antichrist, having two leaders that support its cause.
- This is speaking of a body in the land of Israel. As the first beast will be a group of gentile nations led by the antichrist, and this second beast may be a Jewish entity. In the Old Testament, there are several words translated as “the earth.” The most prominent word, *eretz*, can and often does mean specifically the land of Israel. The same is true with this word in the Greek, which is *ge*.

It could be that John is building upon this concept. As the first beast is specifically coming out of the “sea,” and this second beast is coming out of the “earth,” the difference may be to define one as Gentilet and the other as Israel.

Another possibility is given by the Pulpit Commentary, saying, “We shall find reason to interpret this beast as self deceit - that form of plausibility by which men persuaded themselves into a belief that they might without harm worship the former beast. ... the writer wishes to show the universal character of the temptations with which Christians are assailed; and thus one beast seems to pertain to the sea, and the other to the earth, thus dividing the whole world between them. And he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. That is, while simulating an appearance of Christ, his words betrayed his devilish nature. The aim of this beast throughout is to assume a plausible exterior, that men may be beguiled by him (cf. vers. 13-17). Such is the nature of that self deceit which we believe this beast to typify. Many men, who were not to be tempted into a renunciation of Christ by the bitter persecution of the first beast, because coming in such a form they recognized easily its true nature, were nevertheless beguiled into such acts by specious reasoning and the deceit of their own hearts.”

That analysis doesn’t explain why there are two horns, meaning two leaders, but it provides a distinction from the first beast.

These are but a few of the countless possibilities that have been suggested concerning this second beast. If it is, in fact, the False Prophet later referred to, it would be a religious body as suggested above. Being a false prophet suggests being in a position to prophesy. At the time of this commentary, the pope is currently making alliances with the leaders of Islam. Such an alliance could have two horns, or religious leaders, but it would certainly speak like a dragon.

If this is speaking of “coming out of Israel,” it could be that the two horns are a false Christianity and a Judaism that has rejected Christ uniting together. This might be an alliance between the Pope and the chief rabbi or even the High Priest of the reestablished temple – uniting their voices in regard to end-times events.

Until the beast arrives, the speculation could go on and on. But it will be known once it comes forth.

Life application: A good way to visualize such an unholy entity is to simply look at the politicians in one’s own city, state, or nation. Far too often people are duped by those who appear to have other’s best intent in mind. However, in the end, they only find wickedness in their elected official. The people of the earth will see one thing, but will come to find another in this Satan-filled beast.

It is important for Christians is to be discerning. We cannot just look at a person, religious or otherwise, and decide he is good or bad based on externals. But rather, we

need to listen to his words, evaluate his actions, and then make our decisions as best as we can. In the end, our hope should never be in a person or government, but in God. As God has sent His Christ to reveal Himself to us, let us place our ultimate hope and trust in JESUS!

Lord, how easily we look to our elected officials as if they have all the answers and as if they are the epitome of moral rectitude, but then we find that they are filled with deceit, moral perversion, and greed. Give us discerning eyes to know the truth of our leaders and to reject those who would bring discredit to Your great glory. Amen.

And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. Revelation 13:12

The previous verse introduced the beast coming out of the earth with two horns like a lamb, but which spoke like a dragon. As noted, those words may be referring to an entity that is religious in nature. If so, it is assumed to be led by the false prophet.

As noted in the previous verse, the speculation could go on and on. At this point in history, the events are future. Being dogmatic about the exact meaning is futile. For now, John says, "And he exercises all the authority of the first beast."

This second beast, possibly led by the false prophet, has the same authority as the first beast. This means that he is filled by Satan just as the first beast is. The antichrist and the false prophet both obtain their authority and power from the devil.

John then notes that he exercises this authority of the first beast "in his presence." This means that what he does is with the expressed approval of the first beast. If this is a religious alliance of the false prophet, it will deal mostly with religious matters while the antichrist will deal with the political/military matters.

With this as a possibility, John next says, "and causes the earth and those who dwell in it." As already noted in several verse commentaries, the word "earth" can mean quite a number of things. The more dogmatic one gets on its meaning, if wrong, the more the analysis will steer away from the correct interpretation. Is this referring to the whole earth? Is it referring to the land of Israel only? And so on. As "the earth" appears to be set in contrast to "the sea" of verse 13:1, the distinction is probably one of two things. It is either religious as opposed to secular, or it is Israel in contrast to the nations.

Because it is speaking of the "earth and those who dwell in it," this may more likely be speaking of the land of Israel. Until the time comes, it is all speculation. But either way, the result is the same. The people of "the earth" are caused, "to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed." There is such a deception concerning these end times events that the healing of the head of the first beast will be a point of awe – "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

This great alliance of nations will appear to be the premier force on earth. As such, allegiance to it is to be expected. This should not be thought unlikely. In the world today, people worship the World Health Organization in the sense that they have all of the medical answers needed to rescue the masses. People worship the UN as if they have all of the governmental answers to align the world under one head. And so forth.

The mentality of globalists is that if it consolidates power and authority, it is a good thing. This is exactly what this false religious beast will convince the people concerning the beast that rose out of the sea (meaning the nations) to become a world power.

If, in fact, the earth is signifying those in the land of Israel – as opposed to the "sea" which signifies the gentile nations – then this religious body will lead astray the Jews who reject the message of the 2 witnesses (that which testifies to the truth of Jesus).

He will have them thoroughly convinced that the beast "whose deadly wound was healed" is worthy of following and giving their allegiance to it. Regardless of whether this is a Jewish person or not, he will have the ability to mislead the masses concerning the workings of the antichrist and will have them following him.

Life application: As unlikely as it seems to us who look forward to these things and understand them from a Jesus-centered worldview, the people of the world won't look at the events around them in this manner. Instead, they will simply think that what they are doing, and the one they are following, is their great deliverer.

This has been the case time and again in history as leaders arise to deceive those who follow them, but when the tribulation comes, it will be on a global scale. As noted above, the consolidation of power by globalists is their own god. They look to man as the final rule and authority, but they fail to see that man without Christ belongs to the devil.

There is only one way to have that default position corrected. That is to accept God's offer of reconciliation which came about in the giving of His Son. In accepting this, one

moves from the authority of the devil to the authority of God. This can only come through receiving JESUS.

Lord God, it is heartbreaking to read through the pages of the Bible and see the history of man continuously repeating itself. We fall away from the truth, are judged in order to correct us, and then for a short time return to You. But time and again, we stray right back to our ways of error. Give us wise and discerning hearts to follow You obediently. Amen.

He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. Revelation 13:13

The words here continue referring to the second beast that has appeared. As noted, it is probably led by the false prophet of Revelation 16:13 & 19:20. Of this beast, John says, "He performs great signs."

The word "sign" is the Greek word *semeia*. It is the same word often used to describe Jesus' miracles. In 2 Thessalonians 2, it is noted that the antichrist will do these things as well, but they will be false signs. The same will certainly be true with the beast –

> "The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved." 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10

John next notes that included in his false signs is a sign found elsewhere in Scripture. John says, "so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men."

This is something that goes all the way back to Elijah in the book of 1 Kings. At that time, Elijah called for a great contest between the God of Israel and the false god Baal. Baal couldn't do anything because it was no god at all, but Elijah stepped forward and, with only a quiet prayer, came the heavenly response –

> "Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that *was* in the trench. **39** Now when all the people saw *it,* they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He *is* God! The LORD, He *is* God!'" 1 Kings 18:38, 39

Elijah also called down fire on bands of soldiers in 2 Kings 1. The beast will likewise perform this sign by making fire come down from heaven. What John sees may be modern artillery, rockets, or some other type of warfare. It also could be some type of weather control, causing lightning or some other event to occur. Whatever it will be, it will serve its intended purpose.

Life application: The people will see these false workings and the coming verse says that they will be deceived by him. Whatever this fire from heaven is, it will be discernable as a false sign. However, like crop circles and global warming – both of which have abundant evidence for being false – people would rather believe the lie than accept the truth.

All true miracles have the overarching purpose of bringing glory to God. Any supposed miraculous event that doesn't do this is not a true miracle. The beast's signs will only lead people away from God, not to glorifying him. Failure is found in the false prophet's signs, and failure is found in those who follow him because of his false signs.

Unfortunately, if the beast is led by the false prophet, this religious leader will sway people from every corner of the religious spectrum and will be heralded as a great man of God. The root of the problem here is that people have failed to check things out for themselves in the word which God has provided, the Holy Bible.

One cannot know who God is apart from how He has revealed Himself. And He has revealed Himself through Jesus. Further, one cannot know Jesus without reading the word that tells of Him. Be sure to read your Bible. There you will find God, because it is there that you will learn of JESUS!

Heavenly Father, if we would simply devote our time to reading and knowing Your word, we would save ourselves so many pains and woes. But alas, it is far easier to watch TV or go out jogging than to sit and read the beautiful words of life. And because of this, we believe many lies rather than the one truth. Turn our hearts to Your word, O God. Amen.

And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. Revelation 13:14

The words here are still referring to the beast out of the earth that had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. This beast:

– Exercises all the authority of the first beast.

- Causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast.
- Performs signs, even making fire come down from heaven.

John continues referring to this beast, saying, "And he deceives those who dwell on the earth." In verse 13:12, it referred to those who dwell "in" the earth. Here it speaks of those who dwell "on" the earth. The difference may not be important, or it may have significance. As noted in verse 12, the word earth can mean various things, even speaking of those who live in the land of Israel. Here, the word "on" may be used to speak of those who are carnal or worldly-minded. This would provide a reason for the change in preposition. This would then follow logically with Jesus' words of Matthew 24 (a passage speaking of the tribulation period) –

> "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe *it.* **24** For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. **25** See, I have told you beforehand." Matthew 24:23, 24

Jesus didn't say the elect would be deceived, but only "if possible." However, those with worldly mindsets (if this is what changing to the preposition meaning "on" is signifying) are said to be deceived by this beast. They are deceived "by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast."

The signs are the "great signs" referred to in the previous verse and which include causing fire to come down from heaven. Remembering from verse 11 that this second beast is probably a religious organizational structure with two heads (horns). The beast has deceived those who will accept its false religion. The elect of Matthew 24 will see through the deception though. For those whom this second beast deceives, it is "telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image."

Here, the word translated as "telling" is masculine in Greek, making some determine that this must be speaking of a man. But this does not necessarily follow. The masculine was used in verse 13:8 when referring to the beast there. Thus, it can be simply a means of personification. Or this could be referring to a man who stands as the leader of the beast out of the earth, just as the antichrist stands as the leader of the beast out of the sea.

Again, the preposition "on" is used. This makes it seem probable that it is defining a category of people. As noted, it may refer to the non-elect, or worldly-minded. These people are told to make an image. The word "image" is described by Vincent's Word Studies –

“Εἰκών is a figure or likeness. Thus Matthew 22:20, of the likeness of Caesar on the coin. Romans 1:24, an image of men, birds, beasts, etc. Colossians 3:10, ‘the image of Him that created him;’ i.e., the moral likeness of renewed men to God. Christ is called the image of God (Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Besides the idea of likeness, the word involves the idea of representation, though not of perfect representation. Thus, man is said to be the image of God (1 Corinthians 11:7). In this it resembles χαρακτήρ image in Hebrews 1:3. Caesar's image on the coin, the reflection of the sun in the water (Plato, ‘Phaedo,’ 99); and the statue or image of the beast in this passage, are εἰκών.”

With this in mind, this beast out of the earth (maybe the land of Israel, or maybe a religious body, and made up of two leaders who appear to have the best interest of the people in mind) is telling those who dwell on the earth (the worldly-minded) to make an image. If one of the horns of this beast is the high priest in the reestablished temple (as suggested as a possibility in verse 13:11), the use of this word “image” would be especially important. The reason is that the temple service involves the final seven years of Daniel’s “seventy sevens.” It is a seven-year period granted to Israel while still under the Law of Moses. But what does the second of the Ten Commandments, which are the basis for the Law of Moses, say? It is found in Exodus 20:4 –

> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth;”

The Hebrew signifies an idol or image. Based on the word’s root, the implication is that it is hewn or carved. And so, the meaning of “image” here in Revelation is necessary to determine if this is a violation of the second command or not. The word translated as “image” is found ten times in Revelation. It is seen four times in this chapter and then again in 14:9, 14:11, 15:2, 16:2, 19:20, and 20:4.

Again, and again, it is used in connection with the term “beast” and the word “worship.” Therefore, it is a strong indication that whatever the image is, it is an idol. However, what type of idol (carved or otherwise) is not stated. Possibilities will be looked at in verse 13:15. The word translated as “make” in this verse is widely translated. It signifies to make, or to do. Therefore, and regardless of this, the image is made by those who dwell on the earth “to the beast.”

In this, the Greek reads, “make image the beast.” What this means can be debated as well. It can signify “to” the beast, “of” the beast, “for” the beast, “in honor of” the beast, etc. Even the word “image” is given a more specific translation at times, such as

"statue." As you can see, what the translators already believe is how they will make their translation.

The word probably signifies "of" because it seems to fit best with what is coming. It also seems to fit the modern world context. The false prophet has seen the beast have one of its heads receive a mortal wound and yet it recovered. As previously analyzed, it was noted that this was probably a nation within an alliance that will receive a severe wound (militarily, by pestilence, economically, or whatever). It will be so severe that it seemed that nation was dead, but it came back to life. As John says to complete the verse, "who was wounded by the sword and lived."

The first beast had a head (a nation within its organizational structure) that was wounded so severely it was thought it was a goner, and yet it came back as if from the dead. The second beast out of the earth (Israel? A religious body?) with the two horns like a lamb (seemingly caring rulers) will see this and will deceive the people on the earth (the worldly-minded) and cause them to make an image of that first beast.

Life application: The analyses provided of these future events are almost wholly speculation. The main points of consideration – such as a beast, a head, a horn, and a diadem – can be reasonably interpreted based on past depictions (such as from the book of Daniel). However, there is a point where a particular analysis must become pure speculation. Until the present meets up with the future, these things will remain obscure.

Therefore, to be dogmatic about an interpretation is not smart. Any interpretation is speculative.

The main thought here is that if the head of the first beast could survive as it did, then it is obviously a pattern worth emulating. This then will be a worldwide system based on this pattern – a system which will be able to control not just a coalition of countries, but inclusive of Israel. Jesus' words to the people of Israel of Matthew 24 were speaking of events in their future, at a time under law. But those who have come to Him will not be under law. They will have entered their rest, as referred to in Hebrews 4.

For those now in the dispensation of grace, the way to be kept from this time of trial coming upon the whole earth is to accept God's provision as found in the gospel. God sent His Son, he did the work, and God asks us to believe. Let us do so today. Let us put our faith in JESUS.

Lord God, when the events of Revelation come to pass, they will fulfill Your prophecy perfectly. Only after these things occur will it be seen clearly. Until then, help us to be alert and on guard against the wiles of the devil. Give us wisdom in determining Your will for our lives. Thank You for hearing our prayer. Amen.

He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. Revelation 13:15

The previous verse referred to the "image to the beast" that was wounded by the sword and lived. As noted, the preposition "to" could actually be "of," "for," and so on. Translators will choose their translation of such words based on how they perceive what is being conveyed. The word "of" is likely what is actually being conveyed. With that in mind, it now says of this beast out of the earth that "He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast."

The assumption set forth is that this beast (the one out of the sea of verse 13:1) is an alliance of nations that had one nation (one head) seemingly mortally wounded. However, its wound (military, financial, by pestilence, or whatever) appears to be miraculously healed. Because of the amazing turnaround of events for the beast, the beast out of the earth will follow the mold of the beast out of the sea.

As an example, to understand what might be conveyed here, we currently see the EU as an alliance of nations. If one of the nations of the EU were to have a seemingly mortal wound (economical, biological, military, etc.) and the nation were to revive, it would be an indication that this type of unity (represented by the beast here in Revelation) would be worth emulating as it has an underlying strength to heals its own problems.

The beast out of the earth may then develop an "image" or model patterned after this type of arrangement. The word "breath" can also mean "spirit" or "life." Each of these translations is possible and the final decision is left to the individual translator. In other words, the supposed context viewed by the translator allows any of these options.

To give "life" to this image isn't necessarily to breathe the breath of life into it as God did to Adam. Instead, it would mean to animate it in the same way the beast upon which it was patterned is animated; to make it a fully functioning organization. In this capacity, John then says, "that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed."

The beast out of the earth sees the ability of the beast out of the sea to heal, even when one of its heads appears to have died. It is a governmental structure worth emulating, and so an image, a replica of its structure, is made. In forming this image, this new government is given powers. This would refer to the authority to issue edicts and proclamations just like any governmental organization.

To "cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed" then refers to its ability to enforce its edicts and proclamations with the power it has solidified. Whether this is a localized beast in Israel, or a worldwide beast, its structure will be based on the same type of organization as that of the beast out of the sea. There will be a military/religious state constructed which will only tolerate absolute obedience. It will be something like Nazi Germany on steroids, and it will be terrifying for those who won't bow the knee to its evil ways.

Life application: Again, as has been repeatedly stated, the events here are future, and so all that is stated here is speculation. The only way to look forward with any reasonable analysis of what is coming is to look back on words and phrases that have been seen previously in Scripture and try to determine what John is seeing in relation to that.

Various options are given here because the size and scope of what is coming is completely unknown. This is because the word translated as "earth" can refer to the land of Israel specifically, to the inhabitants of the earth, or to the physical world. To be dogmatic about what lies ahead is presumptuous.

What is coming will be understood as the fulfillment of these prophecies by those who see it. This is certain, based on what is said in verse 13:18. The one who is wise will see and understand.

Until then, it is the responsibility of Christians to spread the gospel. It is the one avenue to being spared from the disastrous calamities that are coming upon the people of the world. The only hope is for them to call out now for salvation. The only hope is to call out for JESUS.

Lord, time and again we have seen nations demand absolute obedience from those who are under their scope of authority. This is because we reject You and try to do things our own way. Help us to remember that You alone are worthy of our worship, and if we reject this, we bring great calamity on ourselves. Amen.

He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, Revelation 13:16

This is still referring to the beast out of the earth introduced in 13:11. This is an entity with two seats of power (two horns) that has the same influence over it (meaning the devil) that the beast out of the sea has. The constant question since the introduction of this beast is, "What is the scope of its authority?" Is it limited to the land of Israel? Is it a worldwide religious entity? At our point of looking forward, it is impossible to be dogmatic.

However, this beast deceives the people under its authority, and it will take total control over their lives. As John next says, "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave."

Generally, the term "all" is simply a superlative. If the Bible says, "all Jerusalem," as in Matthew 2:3, it doesn't mean "each and every." It simply means, "all in general." This is often true throughout Scripture. However, by defining "all" with all of the various categories seen in this verse, it is a way of explicitly saying "each and every." By stating different categories in polar opposites the verse leaves no exception for any class – "small and great," "rich and poor," "free and slave." Nobody is exempt. All people under the authority of this beast will be required "to receive a mark." Those who do not will be considered enemies to be dealt with.

Concerning the word "mark," in Greek it is *charagma*. It is generally a literal, visible mark. The word is found once in Acts 17:29 when referring to a thing graven by art. It is then found seven more times in Revelation. It is a brand-mark that provides "undeniable identification," or an "irrefutable connection between parties" (HELPS Word Studies).

All people under the authority of this beast will be branded "on their right hand or on their foreheads." The word *epi*, or on, is used. The KJV translates this as "in," thus giving an incorrect sense of what is being conveyed. This will be a branding of some sort as means of identifying with the beast.

It is of note that the same general terminology is found in Exodus 13 –

> "And it shall be, when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you, that you shall set apart to the Lord all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males *shall be* the Lord's. … It shall be as a sign on your hand

> and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt." Exodus 13:11, 12 & 16

Both Exodus 13:16 and Revelation 13:16 use the same terminology – the sign is on the hand and on the forehead. This numerical parallel appears purposeful. The identification in Exodus ultimately anticipates the coming Messiah, Jesus, and is thus an identification with Him.

The place between the eyes mentioned in Exodus is the forehead. In the Bible, the forehead is the place of conscience and identification. Therefore, this symbolizes that a person is to set his mind on the law of the Lord. In the New Testament, it is reflective of what Paul says to the Colossians –

> "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. **2** Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." Colossians 3:1, 2

Therefore, the people of Israel were to mentally acknowledge the Lord by thinking on His law and of His handiwork in everything they do. In contrast to this, the mark of the beast on the right hand or on the forehead of those in the tribulation period signifies an acknowledgment of the work and lordship of the devil which is followed by their obedience to him.

They have acknowledged him and have taken either a vow, represented by the right hand, or an oath of assertion, represented by the forehead, to the antichrist. The mark may be visible, but it represents the setting apart of the individual to the devil. This is all the more poignant because Israel, during the tribulation, is fulfilling the final seven years of the law (Daniel 9:27). As this is so, they are to be in compliance with the law. However, Leviticus 19 says –

> "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I *am* the LORD." Leviticus 19:28

Therefore, if this mark is visible, it would be a direct violation of the very law Israel has placed itself under. Considering this mark, whether visible or not, the reader is taken back to Chapter 7 and the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand. They were sealed and set apart to God.

In Chapter 14, that sealing is then described as the name of the Lamb's Father written on their foreheads (14:1). These are then said to be "redeemed from the earth" (14:3).

Thus, they are set in contrast to "those who dwell on the earth" of verse 13:14. Because of all of these internal clues since verse 13:11, it very well may be that this beast "out of the earth" is solely dealing with Israel. This may not be the case, but it is a definite possibility.

Life application: In Ezekiel 9:4, a "mark" is placed on the forehead of the faithful of the city of Jerusalem before the unfaithful were executed –

> "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it."

This mark in Ezekiel certainly wasn't visible, but it was a symbolic representation of those people belonging to the Lord. They had lived their lives for Him and He would protect them during the slaughter.

Surprisingly, the "mark" in Ezekiel is the word *tav*. The word *tav* is the 22nd letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet and originally was formed in the shape of a cross. The passage is saying, as is revealed at other times in the Old Testament, that the cross is the saving mark of the faithful – looking forward to the work of Jesus Christ.

Because of these patterns and analogies, the "mark of the beast" is probably an acknowledgment of allegiance. The right hand is used for making vows and oaths. The forehead (the spot where one's brains are) is where the mental assertion for our actions is made. Whether visible or not for those in the end times, this mark will be a vow of allegiance which comes about by the mental assertion that the beast is due worship – something only the Creator is due. Therefore, this indicates a rejection of God and an allegiance with the devil.

This condition of obedience to the state is already being worked out in the world. Digital money, vaccines for normal life and travel, and so on, are all a part of the ability of the government to control its citizens. Eventually, total obedience will be demanded. Those who do not comply will have difficult choices to make.

Whether this beast out of the earth is only in the land of Israel or not, it is going to be patterned after the beast out of the sea. As this is so, it is an indication that the same control over the people under that beast already exists. Hence, now is the time to get right with the Lord. It is time to identify with Him and to make the necessary proclamation that you will follow God's Christ. It is time to accept JESUS.

Lord, only You are due our total obedience, worship, and praise. Nothing else in all creation is worthy of this. May we be willing to demonstrate this fact with our lives. Give us the courage to stand and proclaim You no matter what test or trial we face. May we be strong and resolute in our proclamation and allegiance to You. Amen.

and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Revelation 13:17

For context, the verse should be taken with the previous verse –

> "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, **17** and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."

"He" is referring to the beast out of the earth. Or it may refer to the leader of this beast if it is the false prophet to be introduced later. Either way, he has the authority and power to cause all people under his authority to receive a mark on the right hand or the forehead. This mark is to be an identifier so "that no one may buy or sell" without the mark of the beast.

In past ages, there was always a way of getting around such things. However, with the advent of digital money, along with all of the other advances in digital selling, accounting, inventory keeping, and so on, such a scenario seems not only possible, but likely. Government has become more than a controlling factor in the lives of people. Rather, it has become an all-controlling overload. Freedom is a word that no longer has the same meaning it did even a short time ago.

For those under the scope of the authority of the beast, they will either take the mark or they will be completely unable to buy or sell anything. As buying and selling includes pretty much every aspect of physical human existence, it means that life will become almost completely impossible without taking this mark.

As this commentary is typed (the year 2021), test cases for such a system are actively in the works. The world of 2020 faced a supposed biological crisis with the COVID-19 sniffles. Entire economies have been placed into varied levels of lockdown, and certain rights and privileges have been granted to those who obediently have taken a vaccine. For those who have not, privileges have been denied, and threats and accusations have come against them from associates, friends, and even family members.

One can see that if such a scenario is extended to total authority over the people, how quickly those with the mark will rat out those who refuse it. When the mark is mandated, all general commerce will cease without the explicit approval of this beast. As John says, “except one who has the mark or the name of the beast.”

There is a variation in some manuscripts –

- except one who has the mark or the name of the beast (NKJV)
- unless he had the mark—the name of the beast (BSB)

The word “or” would mean they are different things. Without the “or,” the second clause would define the first. The latter seems more likely. The mark is an identifier on the person that carries the name of the beast as a mark of approval. Having this identifier means a rejection of any other system, and a complete allegiance to the authority of the beast. Whether the scope of this particular beast is worldwide, or only in the land of Israel is debatable. Yet, the beast’s total authority is not in question. Each person will be marked with the name of the beast, “or the number of his name.”

The meaning of this is open to endless speculation. The actual number will be given in the next verse, but what relation the number is to the name is currently unknown. One possibility is the assignment of numbers to a name based on the characters of the alphabet. This is known as gematria.

In gematria, a specific value is assigned to each letter. From there, the total is added up. The name of Jesus in Greek gematria is, interestingly, 888. A second-century writing says the following, confirming the use of gematria –

“He will come upon earth clothed with flesh like mortal men. His name contains four vowels and two consonants: two of the former being sounded together. And I will declare the entire number. For the name will exhibit to incredulous men eight units, eight tens, and eight hundreds.”

Gematria is one possibility of what the number of the beast is. However, there are innumerable other ways of coming up with a particular number. As the beast is future to us now, as its name is unknown, and as the means of determining the numerical value of the name is unclear at this time, speculation on what the number is could go on and on – and it does. But each speculation is just that, speculation.

<u>Life application:</u> Jesus’ words of Matthew 10 will take on a whole new context in the tribulation period. Not only will people shun one another over the name of Jesus, but

they will probably be rewarded for betraying those who refuse the mark of the beast. He said –

> "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. **35** For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; **36** and 'a man's enemies *will be* those of his *own* household.' **37** He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. **38** And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. **39** He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." Matthew 10:34-39

Regardless of whether the mark of the beast is visible or tangible or not, it will represent an allegiance to the beast. It will be based on a vow of allegiance and a mental assertion that this is the only right way. Because this beast is filled with the power of Satan and because it will perform false signs, vowing allegiance to it is the same as making a vow to Satan.

As the world already falls under the devil's sway, this vow merely solidifies what is already true – that those who make this vow have no part in the promises of God; they can never be saved. This will become evident in the chapters ahead.

If such a vow of allegiance is refused, it will, in essence, lead to death from starvation. At a minimum, it would lead to a network of crime simply to feed oneself. Those who refuse the mark are destined for terrible times, but if they hold fast to the end by refusing to show allegiance to the beast, then they can be saved.

It is important to note that this type of system has never been fulfilled in past history, and therefore it can only mean that these verses are speaking of the future. Only a view of Scripture that says that there is still a plan and a purpose for Israel after the rapture of the church makes any sense.

In order to deny this, verses must be "spiritualized" to such an extent that their meaning and context actually say nothing worthwhile at all. But when looked at through the lens of God's promises to the people of Israel from the Old Testament as coming to fulfillment at a future date, the entire scenario not only retains sense, but the Bible comes into clarity of focus. God has not rejected His people Israel, but before Jesus returns to them, many difficult times and many hard choices will have to be made.

For all who are wise, they will – right now – pay heed. They will turn their hearts towards God's Gift of grace and mercy. They will turn to JESUS.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the great abundance and blessing You provide to the people You have created. You open Your hand and fill us with good things. Your grace is evident with each meal we eat. Thank You for Your kindness and for the many blessings you provide each day. Amen.

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666. Revelation 13:18

The previous verse referred to the mark, "and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." With that, John now says, "Here is wisdom." The Greek reads, "Here is the wisdom." It is a particular wisdom that is set forth.

The words have several possible meanings. The first is that of calling for wisdom, just as John did in Revelation 13:10 when he said, "Here is the patience of the saints." There, it is "calling for" patience. In this interpretation, it would mean that a special wisdom would be needed to determine what will next be said.

Another possibility is that it is saying there is a special wisdom that has been demonstrated in the laying out of what will next be expressed. That wisdom then calls for those with understanding to pay heed.

Other lesser likely possibilities have been suggested for the meaning. The most normal interpretation would be the first option, wisdom is necessary in order to determine what John is conveying. However, an obvious problem with that is that unless that wisdom is a "simple" wisdom, meaning that anyone can readily understand it, then it will not be attainable to the "simple." In other words, it says in Proverbs 9:10 –

> "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom,
> And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding."

The words of the proverb reveal a "simple" wisdom. Anyone can do it. It doesn't take a textbook and years of study to grasp what is plainly stated – "Fear the Lord and you will be wise." Those who do not have understanding will take the mark, not knowing to refuse it

If it is a simple wisdom, it is something that anyone can readily understand and be warned about. Thus, a highly intelligent person may know the meaning and still take the mark because he has no wisdom. But a person simple in the head, but who is wise towards the Lord will demonstrate “the wisdom” and not take the mark. With that considered, John next says, “Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast.”

This follows the same theme as the proverb just cited. The first clause spoke of the beginning of wisdom. The second refers to knowledge of the Holy One being understanding. The two thoughts are parallel. The same is probably the case here. The understanding is displayed in calculating the number of the beast.

The word translated as “calculate” is used only in Luke 14:28 and here. It comes from a root meaning to use pebbles in enumeration. Thus, it is to count or to add up. In the commentary of the previous verse, the study of gematria was referred to. That is where a specific value is assigned to each letter of an alphabet. From there, the total is added up. For example, it was noted that the gematria of Jesus in Greek (the language of the New Testament) is 888.

This same method of gematria is probably what is being referred to. Eight is the number of superabundance. It is also the starting of a new series of numbers. In this, one could say “new beginnings,” because seven is the number of completion and rest. EW Bullinger shows that six in Scripture is “the “number of imperfection; the human number; the number of MAN as destitute of God, without God, without Christ.”

With this in mind, John next says, “for it is the number of a man.” This actually aligns perfectly with Bullinger’s commentary on biblical numbers. This is dealing with a man and not a “god.” He bears imperfection and he is without God. Thus, he is set in opposition to Jesus. The verse says that this is the number of the beast, but the beast is represented by a man.

A question arises which is left open to speculation though. Is this “beast” the beast out of the sea, or is it the beast out of the earth? In verse 13:15, it says, “He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”

The word “he” that opens the verse is referring to the beast out of the earth. The words then refer to the image of the beast. That is referring to the beast out of the sea, led by the antichrist. However, if the “image” of the beast is simply a copying of the system set forth by the antichrist, then the words now refer to the beast out of the earth (led by

the false prophet) and not the beast out of the sea (led by the antichrist). Verse 13:16 continues referring to the beast out of the earth – "He causes all."

Either way, the number is that of a man. John finishes the verse and the chapter with "His number is 666." This may be the most studied, debated, misused, and twisted set of words in the entire Bible. People who don't even believe in the truth of the Bible seem to find themselves drawn in by them. From the earliest days after John received Revelation, people have tried to fit someone they don't like, or some contemporary ruler, into the number of this man.

In order to find fulfillment of the verse at the time of John, people have attempted to align the number with the emperor Nero. In doing this, one must spell his name wrong and convert his name to Hebrew (which makes no sense as the New Testament is written in Greek). Or as an option, they will use the number 616, not 666.

In order to substantiate this as valid they use a variation in manuscripts that has the number 616 instead of 666. However, the overall consensus of manuscripts, and of ancient commentaries on this number, clearly state that the correct number is 666. But in order to justify that the antichrist was Nero, someone changed a manuscript after calculating the number.

This view is popular with replacement theologians, because it then places the events of Revelation in the first century AD, and it means that the church has replaced Israel. This is not sound. Nero wasn't the antichrist and only a foolish attempt at biblical interpretation could come to this conclusion.

Another habit of those desperate to solve the mystery is to convert one's own language, such as English, into gematria and then "solve" the mystery of the number. Again, this is unsound. The Bible was not written in English. Such manipulations of the intent of the words in this verse are always popular, but they are not theologically sound.

Countless attempts have been made to match this number with many other world leaders for the past two thousand years. But this approach is actually pointless for Christians, because Paul explains in 2 Thessalonians 2 that this man, be it the antichrist or the false prophet, won't be revealed until the Day of the Lord. This period will only begin after the rapture of the church –

> "Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, **4** who

opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

-2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4

A few things we can know from this verse –

1) The wise will be able to understand who this person is when he is finally revealed.
2) The number requires a sort of calculation that can be understood from a biblical perspective.
3) It is the number of a man.

Life application: It is exciting to try to figure out what John is saying in this verse because people want to be the ones with the secret "wisdom" that nobody else possesses – "Everyone else has been wrong. I am right. I am the man of wisdom." In order to demonstrate that wisdom, they then show themselves unwise.

Until this person is revealed during the tribulation period, we can only make guesses as to who this person is. Should we be wrong, as so many have been throughout the ages, we only bring discredit upon ourselves, and we give those who look for reasons to dismiss the Bible abundant reason to mock Christianity.

The best approach concerning the number is to not spend an inordinate amount of time on it, but rather direct our attention to the greatness of Jesus, the true Christ. Save your money and don't buy the book. Save your time and don't watch the video. Don't waste your effort and attempt to show yourself wise. The number will be understandable at the time when this man is revealed. If you want wisdom now, fear the Lord, seek after God as He has presented Himself, and call out for His Gift of life and restoration. Call out for JESUS!

Lord Jesus, Your word asks us to fix our thoughts and eyes on You. Help us to remember this and to not get sidetracked by hype and sensationalism – especially over things that are hidden until the time they are to be revealed. You alone are worthy of our devotion and praise, so help us to remember this as we live out our lives in Your presence. Amen.

CHAPTER 14

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. Revelation 14:1

There are two major differences in source texts in this verse. One is that it says, "the Lamb" instead of "a Lamb." The other is that it adds a few words, saying, "had His name and His Father's name." With that noted, John begins Chapter 14 with a new vision. It is a vision tied into that of Chapter 7. This interlude is given before returning to the bowl judgments which follow the trumpet judgments. Of this interlude, John begins with, "Then I looked."

John's attention is drawn away from the vision of the two beasts (one out of the sea and one out of the earth) to a new scene. Continuing, he says, "and behold, a Lamb." As noted, some manuscripts say, "the Lamb." Either way, it is Christ Jesus. He is being depicted here as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (verse 13:8). In other words, the scene is speaking of the atoning nature of Christ's work. Of this Lamb, John says He is "standing on Mount Zion."

The vision is a heavenly one, depicting victory in the Lamb. He is standing. Mount Zion was originally a designation for a hill at the south edge of Jerusalem captured by David in 2 Samuel 5:7. The name is developed in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah, to refer to the whole city of Jerusalem and which speaks of the place of the worship of the Lord on earth. It is the place of the temple and all of its associated rituals.

The term is used to refer to the same location in the future as well. It is from this place that Isaiah says –

> "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
> *That* the mountain of the LORD's house
> Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
> And shall be exalted above the hills;
> And all nations shall flow to it.
> **3** Many people shall come and say,
> "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
> To the house of the God of Jacob;
> He will teach us His ways,
> And we shall walk in His paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
4 He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore." Isaiah 2:2-4

Isaiah's words describe the rule of Messiah from Jerusalem during the millennium. However, that only is an anticipation of the true worship in the heavenly Mount Zion. This is referred to in the book of Hebrews –

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, **23** to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, **24** to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel." Hebrews 12:22-24

Even if Christ's reign in the millennium is literally from Jerusalem, as noted by Isaiah, it is still a heavenly reign because Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament types found in the temple, its rites, and in its worship. To worship Jesus is what all of those things anticipated. With that noted, John next says, "and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand."

The one hundred and forty-four thousand are those mentioned in Revelation 7:3-8. They are Jews, redeemed as "firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (14:4). They have been taken from the tribes of Israel. Being firstfruits, they are reflective of a greater harvest to come. Of them, John next says, "having His Father's name written on their foreheads." As noted above, various texts say, "His name and His Father's name."

In verse 7:3, it said they were sealed as "the servants of God on their foreheads." The variation in the text of Revelation 14:1 means that someone either wanted to diminish the notion of Jesus' deity by removing the words in question, or someone wanted to solidify it by adding them in. The former seems more likely. Either way, however, these Jews are sealed, having been saved by the atoning work of Christ. They are His forever.

Of these redeemed, the common teaching is that they are going to be evangelists during the tribulation period. This may be true, but that is not stated anywhere in Revelation.

The word simply states that they are sealed, having the name of God written on their foreheads. From there, more will be said of them, but nothing refers to them in an evangelistic capacity. Being firstfruits, they are reflective of a much greater harvest – whether by their evangelism or some other way.

Life application: The previous chapter referred to the beasts out of the sea and earth, and of the mark of the beast. This chapter begins with those Jews who are sealed (meaning saved), and it will refer later to those who do not take the mark and who "die in the Lord."

In other words, the sides are being divided up. Those who accept the number of the beast and bow allegiance to him will be eternally condemned. Those who follow the Lamb will be His forever. Even if they die, they will be raised to eternal life. The contrast couldn't be clearer, and the consequences of the choice will be fixed.

Now, during the church age, we have the choice of following Christ or rejecting Him. Once the decision for Christ is made by a person who accepts the gospel and believes, he will be saved forever. During this time, we have our own trials to face, but they are nothing compared to what lies ahead during the tribulation.

Those who are wise now will avoid entering that time of trouble by receiving the Gift of God through remission of sins. This was made possible through the shed blood of the Lamb of God. Believe today! Seek after God as He has presented Himself, and call out for His Gift of life and restoration. He is JESUS.

Great and mighty is the Lord God! How wonderful to know that despite the wickedness in the world today, the battle is already won. Jesus has prevailed and will return again to rule all nations. May that day be soon! Hallelujah and amen.

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. Revelation 14:2

Chapter 14 reintroduced the one hundred and forty-four thousand first seen in Chapter 7. They are seen together with the Lamb on Mount Zion. With that scene before John, he next says, "And I heard a voice from heaven." A single voice from heaven is heard. Therefore, this is not the multitude recorded in verses 7:9-11. Nor is it the "loud voices" recoded in verse 11:15. Rather, One is speaking forth who has "the voice of many waters."

It is the voice of the Lord Jesus as was seen in Revelation 1:15 –

> "His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters."

The voice of many waters was described in detail in verse 1:15, but simply stated, it gives the sense of the roaring of the sea, crashing and terrifying. It is one voice, but it is as if a multitude of voices, all with varying wavelengths, is speaking at one time. This is John's way of describing the thundering resonance of the Lord's awesome and glorious voice. John then says it is also "like the voice of loud thunder."

This may be compared to the voice of the first of four beasts that call forth in verse 6:1, the voice of the Lion –

> "Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, 'Come and see.'"

The lion's voice is one of kingly authority. This is exactly what one would expect as the Lamb stands on Mount Zion, the place of the King of Israel –

> "Yet I have set My King
> On My holy hill of Zion." Psalm 2:6

The symbolism of Revelation 5 is called to mind here where both the Lion (5:5) and the Lamb (5:6) were seen. Each revealed a different aspect of the work of Christ. It is so here as well. He is both the Redeemer of the one hundred and forty-four thousand, and He is their King. John next speaks of these redeemed Jews, saying, "And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps."

The Greek more closely reads "voice" instead of "sound." It is most probably both the playing of harps and singing that accompanies the playing of them. As noted in verse 5:8, this would be a lute or a guitar (the Greek word *kithara* is the root of guitar).

It will be understood from the coming verse that these harpists are the one hundred and forty-four thousand.

<u>Life application:</u> The 66th Psalm shows us one intent of music when used in worship –

> "Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!
> **2** Sing out the honor of His name;
> Make His praise glorious.
> **3** Say to God,

> "How awesome are Your works!
> Through the greatness of Your power
> Your enemies shall submit themselves to You.
> **4** All the earth shall worship You
> And sing praises to You;
> They shall sing praises *to* Your name." *Selah* Psalm 66:1-4

In the New Testament, Paul says –

> "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. **17** And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Colossians 3:16, 17

Music and singing are ways of exalting God. They are used to both bring Him the honor and glory He is due. It is a means of aligning our minds with proper thinking in regard to His wonderful works. At the same time, they are for building others up to the attainment of that same attitude. Let us be sure to follow this pattern and sing out to the Lord of His great and wonderful works. Especially in the cross and resurrection. Let us thank God in song for JESUS!

Oh God, we will sing praises to You, our Redeemer and King. With every bit of our fiber, may we remember to praise and exalt You for what You have done. Praise You, Lord, for Your mighty deeds among the children of men. Hallelujah to the Lamb who has redeemed us to God! Amen.

They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. Revelation 14:3

John continues with his vision of the one hundred and forty-four thousand, saying, "They sang as it were a new song before the throne." The Greek is present tense – "They sing" rather than "They sang." The Greek uses an adverb, *hós*, which is variously translated, but which is used in a comparative sense. Strong's says, "it also assumes the nature of a conjunction, of time, of purpose, and of consequence." Hence, the NKJV says "as it were."

What is surely being conveyed is that this is referring to what is recorded in verse 5:8, 9 where it says –

"Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. **9** And they sang a new song, saying:"

It was these figures of that vision who sang a new song. Here, it is the one hundred and forty-four thousand. They have joined the heavenly chorus in singing before the throne, meaning they have come to accept that Christ is Lord and the One who sits on heaven's throne. John next says, "before the four living creatures."

The four living creatures are those that picture the four gospels. It is these gospels that depict the life and work of Christ, detailing the four aspects of His ministry – the lion, the calf, the man, and the eagle signifying His kingly authority, His servanthood, His humanity, and His deity. John continues with "and the elders."

As noted in the Chapter 4 commentary, these picture the heavenly government of Christ being praised by those of Israel and those of the nations, united as one government under Christ. John then next states, "and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand."

The meaning of this is that the song of redemption is one that can only be learned by those who have been redeemed in the manner in which their redemption occurred. It is not saying that the song cannot be learned by anyone else in the absolute sense. But only those who come to know Christ can learn the song as it pertains to them.

The song is the same theme of the one sung in Revelation 5:9, but it is only intelligible to these one hundred and forty-four thousand. In 5:9, it included "every tribe and tongue and people and nation." Here it is redemption of only this group of Jews. In their redemption, they can sing their own new song before the throne. This is surely what is conveyed because the song that was sung in Chapter 5 was also one of redemption –

"You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
10 And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth." Revelation 5:9, 10

Being a song of redemption, the redeemed can learn it. In this case, those who can learn it are this group of Jews "who were redeemed from the earth." The Greek word

translated here as “redeemed” means “purchased” or “bought.” A price was paid for them, which was the blood of Christ, signifying His death. They are now a part of the heavenly chorus.

Life application: Singing a new song is a theme that goes back to the Old Testament and is found in no less than five psalms. One example is in Psalm 96 –

> “Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
> Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
> **2** Sing to the LORD, bless His name;
> Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.
> **3** Declare His glory among the nations,
> His wonders among all peoples.” Psalm 96:1-3

Although this verse in Revelation contains a “new song,” it is only so because of the progressive working of God in human history. In other words, the overall message of such a song will be the same – proclaiming the greatness and the glory of God in His unfolding plan of redemption.

Even if a “new song” for the Old Testament saints will be different than a “new song” for the New Testament saints, the salvation is ultimately of the same source – the Person and work of Jesus Christ. But how that salvation is brought about in the individual has differences.

Old Testament saints, prior to the Law of Moses, looked forward to it in their own unique way. Those who lived during the Law of Moses looked forward to it in a different way. Each succeeding “dispensation” has the same Savior, but with a clearer picture of His work. In the end, though, each relies on grace through faith in Him for their redemption.

Over the ages, people have tried to identify who the 144,000 are. Cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses claim it springs from specially sealed members within its organization. Many older, mainstream denominations claim it is symbolic of the redeemed of all the ages and thus excludes Israelis of a future tribulation period. All such analyses are wrong.

Chapter 7 clearly identifies these as Jews, not cult members of aberrant denominations or sects, and they are also not a “symbolic” counting of the redeemed of the ages. The same scholars who argue this view also argue that the twenty-four elders are representative of the redeemed of the ages. This then confuses the narrative.

If the twenty-four elders of Chapter 4 are representative of the government of the redeemed, then why would the one-hundred and forty-four thousand need to be its own separate category here? There are also the great multitude in white robes (and so on) who must be accounted for.

No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand referred to here because they are not of the same group. The new song reflects the process of the redemption of these numbered and sealed Jews of the future. The reason that no one could learn that song is because this specific redemption has only happened to them.

As an example, only a person who was on the Titanic and was saved from that drowning can "sing the song of the Titanic." Only a person who was on the Lusitania and was saved from that accident can "sing the song of the Lusitania." The salvation was the same, from drowning, but the actual experience in time and history is unique to each situation. This is the same for these one hundred and forty-four thousand. No one else can sing their song because it is a unique event that God has designed for them alone.

In the end, each of us is redeemed by the blood of Christ, but our salvation story is unique to us. From there, it is brought into a larger category, such as "from this tribe, and then a larger one, such as "from this nation." Eventually, however, all redemption comes to the final, single category of us being from humanity. All redemption comes solely because of the shed blood of the Lamb. No matter who is in heaven, and no matter what the individual salvation was like, in the end, it came solely and completely in one way alone. It came through JESUS.

Heavenly Father, it is important for us to realize that we are all saved in the same way, but not in the same context. We can't insert our salvation experience into another person's life, and so we cannot make unfounded assumptions about their walk with You either. Help us to focus on the fact that they are redeemed through faith in Christ. Thank God for Jesus Christ! Amen.

These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among* men, *being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. Revelation 14:4

John continues with his description of the one hundred and forty-four thousand that were "redeemed from the earth," saying, "These are the ones who were not defiled with women." The words here, and in the next clause, have given rise to all kinds of unusual – and even strange – doctrines. This is speaking of a particular group of end-times Jews. It also prescribes nothing.

The words cannot be used to justify the Roman Catholic doctrine concerning chastity of their priests, alluding to the notion that being with a wife somehow defiles a man. Marriage is, elsewhere, said to exclude that –

> "Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Hebrews 13:4

It is sex outside of the bonds of marriage that defiles. This includes homosexual sex, which is practiced by a gigantic part of the RCC's priesthood, as evidenced in countless lawsuits and media exposés over the past many years. However, a perverse mindset could use this verse to supposedly "justify" such behavior, saying, "it is only sex with a woman that defiles."

The point here is that these men being referred to have remained free from intimacy with women outside of the bonds of marriage. However, the words have been spiritualized to indicate that this is referring to idolatry and superstition rather than actual sexual intercourse. That could be argued from other verses in Scripture. But John next restates the words, using parallelism, to show what the most likely meaning of the first clause is, saying, "for they are virgins."

The word translated as "virgins" is generally considered to signify a person who has not had sex. It can simply mean "pure," as in 2 Corinthians 11:2, where Paul equates those of the church as being a chaste virgin –

> "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ."

Despite this, John's restating of the thought in two different ways shows us that he is most likely referring to actual virgins. These are men who have not had sex outside of marriage, and also who were not yet married. Instead, they were sealed and have been set aside to God. And there is a reason for this that will be mentioned towards the end of this verse's analysis. In this state, John next says, "These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes."

The meaning of this is, "As believers, they live for Christ at all times and in all ways, even to death." As a lamb will follow a shepherd, these men have a calling that is above all else. The fact that Christ is again referred to here as "the Lamb" signifies the sacrificial act of His ministry. He is the One who took away the sin of the world through His death. To follow the Lamb, then, means that these men will be willing to also die. The nature of

the Leader of the flock is seen in those who follow Him. It is reflective of the words of Paul in the book of Acts –

> "Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. **13** Then Paul answered, 'What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'" Acts 21:12, 13

Like Paul, regardless of what this physical life holds, these men will stay focused on the goal, and will not be swayed from the path of righteousness in Christ. The same type of calling was laid upon Simon Peter in John 21. The Lord set him as an example to the sheep and told him that he was to follow his Lord, even to his death. This will be the calling of the one hundred and forty-four thousand because, as John next says, "These were redeemed from *among* men."

It is the same word just used in the previous verse. It signifies to purchase. Christ's blood is what purchases those who come to Him in faith. The world is sold out to sin, and only what Christ has done can make the necessary purchase from that state. Saying they were redeemed from *among* men shows us this.

Man without Christ does not belong to God, but to the devil. Christ came to restore man to God. His life is the price of that redemption. These men have believed, and He has redeemed them through that act. Of them, John finishes with the thought that they are "firstfruits to God and to the Lamb."

Because of the wording here, it is assumed that these one hundred and forty-four thousand are a special portion among whom special favor is given. The cult known as the Jehovah's Witnesses claims that only one hundred and forty-four thousand of their members will go to heaven, and all the rest will live on earth for all eternity – thus setting up two classes of believers.

The amount of theological error in this is immense, but it is similar in thought to the doctrine of countless others. The first point to be remembered is that these are Jews (their tribal connections were explicitly stated in Revelation 7). The second thing to remember is that "firstfruits" are a separate category in time, not in being.

In other words, the idea of the firstfruits that is derived from the Old Testament, is that of being the first as a representative of a greater whole. This even carries through in the New Testament –

"Not only *that,* but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body." Romans 8:23

"For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy;* and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches." Romans 11:16

"Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ." Romans 16:5

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **21** For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. **22** For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. **23** But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming." 1 Corinthians 15:20-23

"I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints." 1 Corinthians 16:15

"Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." James 1:18

These (along with Revelation 14:4) are all of the references to "firstfruits" in the New Testament. Each of them clearly indicates the first of others to come, all having the same characteristics. These one hundred and forty-four thousand, then, are different only in time, not in being. They are the firstfruits of a great harvest, a harvest of tribulation saints, to come. Their state of physical purity is selected for a reason. It is to demonstrate that all of those who come to Christ will be like them – not meaning virgins, but pure.

In other words, the purification of Christ upon the tribulation saints will be complete. Those who are redeemed by the Lamb will be as undefiled as these who were set apart as the firstfruits. They will be washed, purified, and sanctified as holy. This is the marvel of the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb.

<u>Life application:</u> As just noted, the one hundred and forty-four thousand being redeemed from Israel as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb means they are symbolic of the rest of a harvest. They are redeemed in anticipation of the redemption of many others. The harvest, which is God's crop of souls cleansed and purified by the work of

Jesus, is coming. But it will be during a time of great trial and woe. People will have to follow the Lamb wherever He goes, meaning even to death.

For those who do, great things lie ahead for them. But now, before that time, we have been given a wonderful and blessed hope of being saved out of that time of tribulation. All God asks us to do is to believe the gospel message. In this, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and will be taken to glory before the tribulation begins. This is the hope of the rapture of the saints. It is a hope that has its solid foundation in the Lamb, our Lord JESUS.

It is by the precious blood of Jesus Christ that defiled man is cleansed and purified. Thank You, Lord, for Your work done on our behalf! On our own, we are impure in thought, word, and deed, but by the beauty of Your cross, we are cleansed from all impurity. Thank You, Lord Jesus! Thank You. Amen.

And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God. Revelation 14:5

There are a couple of differences in source texts that are worth noting. A translation from each of them shows this –

- And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God. NKJV
- And no lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. NASB

With this noted, John continues his description of the one hundred and forty-four thousand, saying of them, “And in their mouth was found no deceit.”

Whether the original word is “deceit” or “lie,” the idea is that these have made the profession that marks them as true followers of Christ. There is nothing dishonest or manipulative in their speaking. This is probably connected to the thought of the previous verse that said, “These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” In other words, what they say will never betray their allegiance to Christ, even to death.

With this stated, John continues with, “for they are without fault.” The word used here signifies without blame, fault, or spot. It was used of Christ in 1 Peter 1:19 where He is called “a Lamb without blemish.” In their profession of Christ, they are imputed His righteousness and perfection, thus they are likewise without blemish. This state is (with words left out of some manuscripts) “before the throne of God.”

The idea is not that these purchased Jews were without spot in and of themselves, but that they were made so through their profession. This is the same thought as those mentioned in Revelation 7 –

> "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. **15** Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them." Revelation 7:14, 15

This state is especially highlighted because it occurs during the tribulation period. Despite all of what will come against them, they will hold fast to their faith in Christ. But this state is true of all believers in Christ. All who are accepted by God are considered spotless, but that only comes through the perfection of Christ. Without Christ, none shall be accepted –

> "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."
> -Revelation 21:27

<u>Life application:</u> Isaiah 53:9 says this about Jesus –

> "Because He had done no violence,
> Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth."

The similar terminology is used for these believers because they are in Christ. It is reflective of the state of any person who has accepted Him as Savior. Although we may continue to sin in our lives, we are already forgiven of those sins and are even now seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

Yes, if you have trusted Christ, even now you are seated with Him. All sins have been forgiven through faith in His finished work. God has seated you with the redeemed of the ages. Your work is done, faithful Christian. If you have not yet received Christ, today would be a good day to change that. Call out to God and be purified through His offering of JESUS!

O Lord God, how great You are for cleansing us of our wrongs – past, present, and future. For those who have come to You through Christ, You have seated us in the heavenly places in Him. Because of His work, we can rejoice in Your presence for all eternity. What an amazing gift of love, grace, and mercy You have bestowed up us. Praises to You O Lord! Amen.

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people— Revelation 14:6

After referring to the one hundred and forty-four thousand, John's attention is redirected. With this redirection, he next writes, "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven."

The Greek word *mesouranéma* was introduced in verse 8:13. It signifies the meridian, or the highest point in the heavens (the zenith), that the sun occupies in the middle of the day. It is not speaking of the space between heaven and earth.

Like much of the symbolism of Revelation, it shouldn't be taken that the people of the world will look up and see this angel. Instead, John is describing what is occurring in the spiritual realm. For all we know, this angel represents a satellite beaming out a message, or it is simply a spiritual reality (such as people proclaiming a message) being depicted by this angel. Whatever is being conveyed, John next says that the flying angel has "the everlasting gospel."

In the Greek, there is no definite article in the words. Rather than "the eternal gospel," it should read something like "an eternal gospel," or "an eternal message of good news." Thus, it is not specifically referring to the gospel of Christ – His death, burial, and resurrection – but of a message of good news that has been all along and that will continue to be. What that message is will be explained in the coming verse. John says that the angel has the message "to preach."

The word "preach" is the verb form of the noun just translated as "gospel." Both the noun and the verb were introduced in the book of Matthew, and this is the final use of both in Scripture. Because there is no article before "gospel," this should be translated as "proclaim" or "declare" rather than "preach." The application is wider than just preaching to a crowd. It is a proclamation that is issuing forth. With this understood, John says the message is "to those who dwell on the earth."

This proclamation is one that is eternal in its nature, and it is all-encompassing in its scope. In other words, it is a message that is proclaimed to all people at all times without limitations. As it is a proclamation to all who dwell on the earth, it means that judgment is coming because of not paying heed to it. The proclamation is without bias. Rather, it is "to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people."

As this is so, it is in a universally understood language. This proclamation of an eternal message of good news is basic enough for a child to comprehend – even if not fully understood. It is also involved enough for the most intelligent scientist to not only grasp, but to be assured of the truth of it.

Life application: This eternal message of good news is going forth, even at this time of judgment known as the tribulation. Its purpose has been, and it will continue to be, a message calling people to repentance and turning to God. This is done because there have been, and there still will be, false gospels. Paul warned of them in the first chapter of Galatians –

> "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, **7** which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. **8** But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be [b]accursed. **9** As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." Galatians 1:6-9

Paul is referring to the gospel of Jesus Christ. But one cannot accept that gospel without first accepting the general tenor of the angel's proclamation. God has never left the world without a testimony, but He has also allowed people to make up their own minds about who He is and the truth of His nature, character, and being. People are given free will and must exercise that free will by calling out to Him.

To state otherwise is to negate the very concept of love. If God doesn't allow us to choose, then the choice is forced. If it is forced, then it cannot be accompanied by true love, which is a volitional act of the will. Forced love is no love at all.

The message from the Creator is always proclaimed to allow us to accept Him freely and to love Him because He first loved us. This is a truth from the beginning, and it was clearly and finally revealed in the giving of His Son. God has revealed the extent of His love for us in the giving of JESUS.

Lord, help us to get our thinking straight. You offer your gospel, and then we must respond to that offer. Once the offer is accepted, we are saved and granted eternal life. Help us to see that only by calling on You, and what You have done through Jesus, can we be saved. It is not by our own deeds, but by what You have done in the cross of Jesus – our Lord. Amen.

saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water." Revelation 14:7

In the previous commentary, it was seen that there was no article before "everlasting gospel." Thus, it more rightly reads something like "an eternal gospel," or "an eternal message of good news." The words of this verse will reveal what that gospel is. The angel flying in the heavens proclaims it to those who dwell on the earth. John now says of this angel's proclamation, "saying with a loud voice."

It is an indication that all are to hear. What will be conveyed is clearly conveyed to (as the previous verse said) "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people." In other words, the message is in a universally understood language. And that message begins with, "Fear God and give glory to Him."

The rapture has occurred, the world will be judged for rejecting God's offer in Christ. Those who are on the earth have failed to give God the glory He is due. Those who claim they do are only paying lip service to Him. The call by the angel is being set in complete contrast to the beast out of the earth who told those who dwell on the earth "to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived."

This is then verified by the next words, "for the hour of His judgment has come." The world has set itself in opposition to God. There is the giving of allegiance to the beast by taking the mark. In doing so, it is a stamp of identification that they have rejected any allegiance to the true God. And yet, the call of the angel of an eternal gospel has gone out in a universally understood way. It is a warning that this should not happen and only God is to be worshiped. As the angel next says, "and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

The translation leaves off articles in the Greek, and also includes articles not in the Greek. It properly reads, "and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth, and sea and springs *of* waters."

This is the eternal gospel. It is based on God's natural revelation of Himself through the creation. God has made both the heaven and the earth. They did not create themselves and there was no evolutionary development of them. They were not, and then they were. The sea and springs of waters are also a part of His design. This is a universally understood message that is being called out.

While the beast is being hailed as "god," the physical creation, God's general revelation, is shouting out to the people of the world that the beast is no god at all. It is the message found in the 19th Psalm –

> "The heavens declare the glory of God;
> And the firmament shows His handiwork.
> **2** Day unto day utters speech,
> And night unto night reveals knowledge.
> **3** *There is* no speech nor language
> *Where* their voice is not heard.
> **4** Their line has gone out through all the earth,
> And their words to the end of the world." Psalm 19:1-4

It is the message then confirmed by Paul in Romans –

> "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, **19** because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. **20** For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."
>
> -Romans 1:18-20

The general revelation of God clearly shows that He exists, and that by His wisdom He has created. From there, Paul explains that His power and Godhead are understood by these things. Therefore, those who reject this and take the mark of the beast are "without excuse." They have rejected the truth of God in Christ and judgment will fall upon them. This is that "eternal gospel" that is spoken forth in a manner that is universally understood.

<u>Life application:</u> The word of the Lord has been preached since the very beginning, and the knowledge of God is evident even from the creation itself. God asks us to simply think things through – He created; we are the created. As a part of the creation, we are to give Him the reverent fear He is due. In connection with this fear is the command to give Him glory.

This certainly means that we are to return to Him thanks, praise, honor, and a sense of awe for the marvels of what He has done. When an astronomer looks through a telescope and sees innumerable galaxies, God asks him to simply exclaim, "My God, how great You are." Instead, what we hear in the world are exclamations of how

amazing it is that all of this came about by “random chance” and “evolutionary processes.”

Because we fail to honor Him, His judgment will come. There is a point where God no longer tolerates His creatures rejecting Him. He asks us to simply look to Him and praise Him. In essence, the angel is asking the people of the tribulation world to repent. It is as if he is crying out, “Pull your heads out of the sands of humanism, false religion, secularism, and doubt! Acknowledge God and that He is worthy of all honor and glory.”

God has done all these things for the people of the world, but even more – He sent His Christ to reveal Himself to us. He is the Creator, He is the Sustainer, He is our Redeemer. He is JESUS!

Lord, how can we be held guiltless when we look at the work of Your hands and then ascribe the wisdom we see to mere chance? How can we smell a flower or look upon a distant galaxy and not see intelligence in these things? Surely, we are stiff-necked and worthy of Your wrath, but You are patient and call out to us even so. Give us wisdom to respond. Amen.

And another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”
Revelation 14:8

The previous two verses mentioned the angel flying in the midst of heaven imploring the people of the world to fear God and give glory to Him. Now, a second angel follows after the first. Indeed, some manuscripts include the word “second,” saying, “Another angel, a second, followed, saying...” (ESV). Either way, a second is understood. This second angel has its own proclamation, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen.”

Being an aorist verb, a more literal translation would be “Fell, fell Babylon.” As Vincent’s Word Studies notes, “The prophetic aorist expressing the certainty of the fall.” The words hearken back to Isaiah 21 –

> “For thus has the Lord said to me:
> ‘Go, set a watchman,
> Let him declare what he sees.’
> **7** And he saw a chariot *with* a pair of horsemen,
> A chariot of donkeys, *and* a chariot of camels,
> And he listened earnestly with great care.
> **8** Then he cried, ‘A lion, my Lord!

I stand continually on the watchtower in the daytime;
I have sat at my post every night.
9 And look, here comes a chariot of men *with* a pair of horsemen!'
Then he answered and said,
'Babylon is fallen, is fallen!
And all the carved images of her gods
He has broken to the ground.'" Isaiah 21:6-9

This is the first mention of Babylon in Revelation, but from this point on, it will be referred to by name a total of six times, the last being in verse 18:21. The debate over what "Babylon" means in Revelation goes on and on. Some say it is a literal reference to Babylon that will be rebuilt and the headquarters of the end times beast. Some say it is America. Some see it as Jerusalem. As will be seen, it is referring to Rome.

For now, John continues with the vision saying, "that great city." The term "city" will be used again. This is a positive description signifying that the seat and authority of the beast is centered in a particular city, here called metaphorically "Babylon."

It will be a city that bears the characteristics of Babylon of the past. It will be the seat of authority of a larger empire. It will have innumerable influences from pagan origins connected with it. Etc. Each of these, and many other parallels, point it out as being Rome.

Rome fits the description provided by Daniel (Daniel 7 and Daniel 9). It is also an authority that, like Babylon of the past, destroyed Jerusalem and took its people into exile. Further, like Babylon, Rome will not only be the seat of the governmental authority of this end-times beast, but it is the center of authority of false religion. This is, without any question, found in the ever-apostatizing Roman Catholic Church. The importance of that is seen in the next words, "because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

This sentiment will be repeated in verse 17:2 where "Mystery Babylon" is referred to. There, she is a city called "The Mother of Harlots." As this is so, the idea of her fornication is religious in nature. There is the sense of false religion mingling with the leadership of nations, involving itself in affairs that have nothing to do with appropriate religion. The wine of her fornication leads to the idea of being drunk on her offerings. That leads directly to the incurring of wrath for her fornication. The idea of this comes from Jeremiah 51 –

"Flee from the midst of Babylon,
And every one save his life!
Do not be cut off in her iniquity,
For this *is* the time of the LORD's vengeance;
He shall recompense her.
7 Babylon *was* a golden cup in the LORD's hand,
That made all the earth drunk.
The nations drank her wine;
Therefore the nations are deranged.
8 Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed.
Wail for her!
Take balm for her pain;
Perhaps she may be healed.
9 We would have healed Babylon,
But she is not healed.
Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country;
For her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies.
10 The LORD has revealed our righteousness.
Come and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God." Jeremiah 51:6-10

Life application: Throughout the Bible, there are two noted cities – Jerusalem and Babylon. The first represents peace, covenant with God, right religion, godly kingship, true prophecy, holy living, and a declaration of the splendor and majesty of God.

On the other hand, there is Babylon. This city represents chaos, enmity with God, false religion, humanistic-centered leadership, false prophets and false prophecy, unholy and impure living, and a rejection of the truth of the Creator.

When Cain killed Abel, it was to the area of the east that he went and established a society. After the Flood of Noah, Nimrod and the people settled again in this area and established the Tower of Babel. When the Israelites were disobedient, they were exiled to this same area.

Babylon of the New Testament is centered on Rome. Peter, writing from Rome, addresses that city as "Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13). The Roman Empire was never destroyed. It simply faded away, but the elements of its religious side have continued on. Today, the governmental side is being revived for the end times. The world will be facing "spiritual Babylon." This is a global religious/economic power which will be centered in Rome and which will face the great and final destruction before the coming of Christ to rule from Jerusalem.

The wine of her fornication speaks of the spiritual harlotry which will come about by false worship. Too much wine makes one drunk. The nations will be completely drunk with the spiritual apostasy which proceeds from Babylon, and they will be judged for it.

In drinking the wine of this harlot, people will become deluded with her delights and numbed to the truth of God. This is how the world will be seduced away from salvation. What will be presented will seem spiritually right, but it will be of the devil. Rather than being seduced by this false religion, be sure to read the Bible, learn of what is true and good religion before God, and look to the One who epitomizes what He expects from His creatures. Look to JESUS.

Lord, a great day is coming when the world will be ruled in righteousness, and all false religion will be gone. That great day will see Jesus, our Christ and King, reigning from Jerusalem and judging in righteousness. How we long for that glorious moment. Even so, come Lord Jesus! Amen.

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand,
Revelation 14:9

This is now the third angel flying in the midst of the heavens, following the first two. The first called out, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water." The second angel brought words of destruction concerning the great city of harlotry and enmity with God – "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

Now this third angel will give a strong warning. John begins with, "Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice." This is the same thing that was said of the first angel. It called out in a loud voice that God is to be worshiped. This one now calls out in a loud voice, a notion that complements the cry of the first angel, saying, "If anyone worships the beast and his image."

God is to be worshiped. In worshiping any other, there will be consequences. The warning has been called out in a loud voice. Allegiance to the beasts and its image is considered idolatry. The thought continues with, "and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand."

The word translated as "receives" is *lambanó*. It signifies to take, or lay hold of. HELPS Word Studies notes that it "emphasizes the *volition* (*assertiveness*) of the receiver."

Thus, it is a voluntary allegiance to the authority and rule of the beast. The mark can be either on the right hand or on the forehead. This is repeated from verse 13:16. Whether the mark is actually visible or not, it signifies either an oath of allegiance (right hand) or a mental assertion (forehead) of the authority of the beast.

The warning has been given. The consequences for ignoring the warning are forthcoming.

Life application: We can see the progression of thought concerning the pronouncement of the three angels –

1) A note to follow the true God.
2) A proclamation that the enemies of the true God are defeated. And finally,
3) A warning to anyone who would follow the enemies of the true God.

What do you think the warning will include? Certainly not rewards of candy and pleasantries! Instead, there will be the just reward of the Creator who has given every possible chance for the people of the world to acknowledge Him and His greatness and to, by faith, call out to Him, trusting in His eternal promises which were validated in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Worshiping the beast and his image means worshiping that which is less than God. Receiving the mark on the forehead means making a mental assertion that following the beast is worth the price of the bread one eats. Receiving the mark on one's hand is the sworn allegiance to the beast and his image, and it means that allegiance to God has been rejected.

What will be gained by temporary relief will be regretted in everlasting destruction. What can man do to us but harm our temporary, physical life? But what great blessings God can bestow upon us when we place our eternal souls in His mighty hands. Be sure to make the right choice. Call out to God today. Call out to JESUS!

Here we are Lord, all people of the earth are facing eternal decisions. Shall we walk with You, hold to Your word, and call on the name of Jesus? Or shall we walk according to the dictates of our own minds, reject the truth You have given us, and turn away from the only sacrifice which can reconcile us to You? May we be wise and choose life. May we choose Jesus. Amen.

he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. Revelation 14:10

In the previous verse, the third angel began to issue forth the warning concerning worshiping the beast and his image, and of receiving the beast's identifying mark. The verse now provides details if the warning is not heeded, saying, "he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God."

The words are reminiscent of those of Isaiah 51 –

> "Awake, awake!
> Stand up, O Jerusalem,
> You who have drunk at the hand of the LORD
> The cup of His fury;
> You have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling,
> *And* drained *it* out." Isaiah 51:17

The idea is that God is angry at the disobedience of man. The cup symbolizes that state, and the contents are the resulting actions of that wrath. It is a metaphor used by Jeremiah concerning the judgment of the nations –

> "Therefore you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Drink, be drunk, and vomit! Fall and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you."' **28** And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "You shall certainly drink! **29** For behold, I begin to bring calamity on the city which is called by My name, and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished, for I will call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth," says the LORD of hosts.'" Jeremiah 25:27-29

It is this idea that is being conveyed now in Revelation. To take the mark of the beast is to openly stand in opposition to the Lord and to the gospel of salvation. There can only be one result because of doing so. That person will drink the cup of God's wrath. This is something that would have been understood by those at John's time.

In the Greek culture, a condemned person would be handed a mixture of poison and would have to drink it. It was the manner in which Socrates was executed. For those

being referred to by the angel, John next says of this cup, “which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation.”

This is not unlike the words of the psalmist –

> “For in the hand of the LORD *there is* a cup,
> And the wine is red;
> It is fully mixed, and He pours it out;
> Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth
> Drain *and* drink down.” Psalm 75:8

The Greek words, translated as “full strength,” are literally “mingled unmingled.” In other words, no water would be added to dilute the mixture when it was poured out. It would be full strength, signifying unmitigated punishment. There would be a full measure of the indignation of God (no possibility of leniency) until that person had received his full punishment. With that in mind, the angel’s terrifying words of warning continue, saying, “He shall be tormented.”

The word “torment” refers to torture. This person has made a stand against God, and God will punish him in a manner fitting of his crime, which is “with fire and brimstone.” Brimstone means sulfur. The Greek word is *theion*, coming from *theios*, meaning “divine.” Thus, it looks to the fire of heaven coming down in divine judgment with an unstoppable power. Just as sulfur burns without ceasing, so will the fire and brimstone of God be unquenchable.

The thought goes all the way back to Genesis and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah –

> “Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens. **25** So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.” Genesis 19:24, 25

For those who take the mark, the punishment will be without mercy, and God will bring total destruction upon them. Of this punishment, the angel says it will be “in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”

The magnitude and force of these words cannot be diminished. People might say, “Oh, Jesus would never allow this.” But He is the same Lord who brought the destruction upon Sodom and Gomorrah, consigning it to its fate. The angels of destruction were not restrained. Instead, they were given their orders, and the fire and brimstone came.

The same thought permeates Scripture. Those who see Jesus as a cosmic pushover who will never punish sin have failed to understand what the cross signifies: "God's wrath for your sin will be poured out on Me, or it will be poured out on you. The choice is yours."

Life application: This verse sees the fulfillment of what is deserved for all people of the earth. God is the Creator – perfect and holy, and also infinite. We are finite and, therefore, one sin infinitely separates us from God. It is worthy of eternal punishment.

Although the subject of the cup of God's wrath is reflected throughout the Bible, the example on which all commentaries must hinge is the cup which Jesus accepted –

> "And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, **42** saying, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.' **43** Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. **44** And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Luke 22:41-44

In the greatest act of love and tenderness toward His creatures, God united with human flesh and dwelt among us – fully God and fully Man. He never sinned and yet He offered His life in exchange for ours. He offered His perfection for our imperfection; His righteousness for our unrighteousness; His sinless state for our sins.

After this eternal act of love, all He has asked for is that we simply, by faith, accept His work and trust in it for our cleansing and restoration. The full cup of God's wrath was poured out upon Him. It was drained by Jesus on our behalf. But for those who don't accept Jesus, the only option left is to drink the same cup that He drank. The difference is great though. Because Jesus is sinless, after His suffering He was resurrected to eternal life.

For those who reject this, they must face God's wrath full strength – an infinite punishment against an infinite God. The wrath has no end because God is endless. What a tragic and horrible thought – that we would stand bare and exposed without the covering of the righteousness of Christ… such is the wrath awaiting all who reject His offer.

Surely, we need to look to God's offering now. And we must be sure to tell others about this Gift of love as well. The offer stands as the greatest testament to the love of God – an exchange that brings about eternal joy and peace with the Creator. The offering is JESUS.

Heavenly Father, I stand in awe of the love You have displayed in the Gift of the giving of Your Son and the splendor of His cross. I have nothing to offer that is worthy of this great deed, and so I come before You with empty hands and an open heart, receiving the grace and mercy of His work on my behalf. Thank You, O God, for the cross of Jesus. Amen.

And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." Revelation 14:11

This verse provides the results of those who will be tormented with fire and brimstone that were mentioned in the previous verse. Not only will they be tormented, but it now says, "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever."

As noted in the previous verse, the symbolism here goes back to the Genesis account of Sodom and Gomorrah. But more, the words follow directly after Isaiah 34 –

> "For *it is* the day of the LORD's vengeance,
> The year of recompense for the cause of Zion.
> **9** Its streams shall be turned into pitch,
> And its dust into brimstone;
> Its land shall become burning pitch.
> **10** It shall not be quenched night or day;
> Its smoke shall ascend forever.
> From generation to generation it shall lie waste;
> No one shall pass through it forever and ever." Isaiah 34:8-10

So far, the words could be referring to torture followed by the extinguishment of the person, but the smoke of their burning continues on. However, such a thought is negated by the next words, which say, "and they have no rest day or night."

In other words, this is not speaking of simply being burnt up, but of a constant burning. It reveals that the punishment of those who reject God does not eventually end in annihilation, but it is eternal in nature. The term "day or night" is an idiom signifying something that is unceasing in nature. This is seen again in Isaiah 66 –

> "And they shall go forth and look
> Upon the corpses of the men
> Who have transgressed against Me.
> For their worm does not die,

And their fire is not quenched.
They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." Isaiah 66:24

Jesus uses the same terminology from Isaiah 66 in Mark 9. Revelation 20 will, again, show the eternal nature of punishment for those who are not saved through the work of Jesus Christ. This includes those "who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

As hard as it may be for us to grasp the meaning of, and reason for, eternal punishment, it is a truth that is clearly laid out in Scripture. In the end, a finite offense against the infinite God will result in eternal punishment.

It is not uncommon for teachers of the word to claim that taking the mark can be forgiven, but this is not in accord with Scripture. Those who worship the beast and his image will not be spared. Those who receive the mark of his name will bear their guilt. This verse clearly reveals this.

Life application: The subject of hell is frightening and terrible stuff. This verse is rather clear – anyone who receives the mark of the beast and whoever worships the beast will be tormented forever and ever.

There are other views about the eternal nature of the torment that is coming. One view is that it brings about an immediate destruction (annihilationism). However, this fails to line up with verses, such as those cited above, which clearly state torment is eternal. It also fails to measure up to Jesus' own words about the subject. Annihilationism is false.

A second view says that the punishment will result in the purification of the lost – burning away their sins – and so they will be saved after this torture (purification by fire). This negates the very reason for the cross. If there were another way to be purified, then Christ died in vain. Purification by fire is false.

There is one penalty for those who die apart from Christ. The sight of God at the final judgment is an eternal judgment because the memory of seeing God's glory apart from the covering of Jesus Christ will destroy them infinitely. Such is the holiness of God. But Jesus speaks of greater punishment for some than others –

"And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes.* **48** But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For

> everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." Luke 12:47, 48.

Those who willingly receive the mark of the beast are really in for it. They will worship that which is less than God voluntarily, and they will receive the just punishment for their actions. For any who read this before that time comes, it is hoped that you will demonstrate wisdom and call out to God for salvation now. Call out to Him through JESUS.

O God, we know perfectly well what we deserve. We have lied, stolen, cheated, and been perverse in our hearts and in our words. We have thought wicked things, and we have been at strife with our fellow man. Our punishment is deserved… and yet You sent Jesus to the cross to pay our infinitely large debt. Thank You for restoration and reconciliation because of His shed blood. Amen.

Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Revelation 14:12

The three angels have called out their messages. With that complete, John next writes, "Here is the patience of the saints." Those who are alive during the tribulation period will have to endure life in a world completely at odds with them. They will be shunned, persecuted, and even put to death. These things are coming upon the whole world, and the saints will need to be patient through these times of woe.

This period is described in Daniel 12 in relation to the saints of Israel –

> "At that time Michael shall stand up,
> The great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people;
> And there shall be a time of trouble,
> Such as never was since there was a nation,
> *Even* to that time.
> And at that time your people shall be delivered,
> Every one who is found written in the book." Daniel 12:1

And again, in Daniel 12:10, it says, "Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." Those who "understand" are the same group being referred to by John here in Revelation. Again, he says, "here are those who keep the commandments of God."

Some manuscripts do not have the words “here are those.” Instead, it simply says –

> “Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.” NASB 1995

Either way, the focus of the patience is on those “who keep the commandments of God.” The commandments of God, as has already been noted in the Revelation commentary, are not referring to the Mosaic law. Rather, it refers to faith in Christ Jesus. The theme is referred to several times in John’s epistles. The law of Moses is set aside through the work of Christ. Adherence to God’s provision, as found in the giving of His Son, is alone what is pleasing to God. That is then restated for emphasis with the words, “and the faith of Jesus.”

This is a faith where Jesus is the object of it. He is the Prize. He is the Goal. He is the One to whom the people are to anticipate and hope for, even when it means rejecting the mark of the beast and facing certain death. This is patience of the saints.

Life application: The three messages of the three angels are summarized as –

1) The everlasting gospel.
2) Babylon is fallen.
3) Anyone who worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark, will receive eternal torment.

It might seem backwards to put the falling of Babylon before the worship of the beast, but it is done this way to show that what is coming to Babylon is assured. Its judgment is coming, and it will be final. Those who have joined Babylon through false worship and in the taking of the mark will receive the same sentence, and it will be carried out with the same finality.

Placing direction about the mark last is intended to keep it fresh on the minds of those who hear the word. As people, the consequences of our decisions affect our lives, and some of them will affect our eternal destiny as well. Therefore, the word has been given through John in the pages of Revelation, not only for the tribulation world, but for all people during the church age.

During John’s time, the Roman Empire exacted a high toll on Christians through martyrdom. During the Inquisition and much of the church age, the church itself has murdered the faithful – executing those who stood on God’s word and not on church traditions. Today, Christians around the world are being martyred by adherents to

various false religions with numbers of dead in the millions. They are also being martyred by communist and dictatorial leaders.

For much of the world, the choice of following Jesus Christ means facing a life-or-death choice, but what Revelation is telling us is that such a mortal choice is insignificant in comparison to the eternal choice of rejecting the gospel. Truly, "here is the patience of the saints."

Let us be faithful to the call and faithful to the proclamation. Let us hold fast to our faith in JESUS.

Lord Jesus, no amount of security in this life is worth the loss of eternal life in Your presence. Please help those who are facing the great and terrible decision of life or death for the sake of the gospel to be strong in their convictions and to be obedient to Your message. And should they face death because of the choice, may their reward be great when they come before You. Amen.

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'"
"Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." Revelation 14:13

The previous verse brought to our ears the words, "Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." This was stated at a time when destruction has been mentioned (Babylon is fallen), and when a warning concerning taking the mark of the beast has been made. In calling for patience, it is an obvious indication that hard times lay ahead. With that implicitly understood, John tells what next comes, saying, "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me."

The Greek is more exacting – "Then I heard a voice from out of the heaven." It isn't just a voice of another angel in the midst of heaven like the three that preceded this. Rather, it is a voice separate from and above them. And the words of the voice are, "Write."

In other words, make sure this is quoted directly and recorded in the book. And the message – "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

There is a particular note of comfort to those who will have to face what the previous angels warned about. The times ahead will be of deprivation, alienation, and looming

disaster for any who will not comply with taking the mark of the beast. But it is either take it and live, or refuse it and face death.

Because of the stark contrast, those who must choose are told they will be blessed, but this only applies to those "who die in the Lord." There may be people all over the world who refuse the mark who are not in the Lord. They may have whatever personal reason to refuse the mark. But for those "in the Lord," death will not be the end of the story for them. That is seen in the next words, "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors."

Death for these will actually be a relief. The results of not taking the mark are actually considered labor. It is the labors of staying alive that will be miserable. To die during this time will become a welcome relief, and it is to be considered a time of rest. It is reminiscent of what Paul says concerning believers who die in the Lord –

> "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 4:14

The labor of life ends for the believer, and a state of rest is the result. This is the same comforting thought for those who die in the Lord during the tribulation period. In this event, John writes the final words of the verse, noting that their labors will not be forgotten, saying, "and their works follow them."

The martyrdom they will face will be remembered, and they will receive their just reward for having been faithful to the death. That reward is found in Revelation 20 –

> "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **5** But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. **6** Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Revelation 20:4-6

This, then, is what it means that their labors will follow them. They will be raised to eternal life, and they will also literally reign with Christ for a thousand years. In other words, the system that took their lives will be replaced with a new government, one in

which their lives are to be restored. Further, they will be active participants in that new system.

Life application: The word blessed is the same one that is used in the beatitudes in Matthew 5 and at other key times in the New Testament. It is reflective of great joy that doesn't depend on any external circumstances of our own making. Rather, it comes from the peace and wholeness of the Lord; true contentment. Those who die in the Lord during the tribulation will receive this.

Scholars who teach that the church has replaced Israel see this blessing as one extended to anyone who dies in the Lord from the time of John writing Revelation. In other words, all believers of the church age. Although it is true that church-age believers are so blessed, this is an incorrect analysis.

First, what about those who died between the Resurrection of Christ and the receiving of Revelation? Secondly, the context is very clear that these events are occurring during the Tribulation period; a time directed specifically to the nation of Israel and those who accept Christ from both Israel and the gentile world during this period.

There will be no rest for them in their time of trial, but they will receive a great and blessed reward for their patience, endurance, and faithfulness.

Endurance through the Tribulation will bring a great reward because of the very nature of the suffering, deprivation, and even death that they are willing to endure for the name of Jesus. For those willing to put aside the temporary and look to the eternal, they will be resurrected at the end of the tribulation to eternal life, never to face death again.

It is always a good idea to have something prepared for those who have not yet received Christ in case the rapture occurs before they do. A note of explanation of what lies ahead and the warning of what should and should not be done should be made.

The main thing is to tell them not to take the mark of the beast, but to trust wholly on the provision of God in Christ. He will restore life to them, and more, if they are willing to give up the temporary relief of taking the mark. We can know this is true because He has given the world that restoration already. He has sent JESUS. We can know this is true because He has given the world that restoration already. He has sent JESUS.

Lord, it is wonderful to know that You have secured all the redeemed from all ages and have given them the rest which was available at the beginning when Adam dwelt with You in Eden. Though man lost the right to that rest, it is restored by simple faith in You

and Your great work on our behalf. Thank You for restoring that which was lost! Hallelujah and Amen.

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat *One* like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.
Revelation 14:14

The previous verses spoke of the patience of the saints and faith in Jesus. This will mean dying in the Lord, but good will ultimately result for them as their works follow them. With that recorded, John's attention is next directed to another aspect of what is coming during the tribulation period. He says, "Then I looked."

This is another aspect of the ongoing vision being presented. It is a finishing aspect of this particular presentation, and it will continue until the end of the chapter. It is a time of wrath being poured upon the world. The saints who rejected the mark have been noted. Those who are not saints will now be dealt with by God. As John next says, "and behold, a white cloud."

White is reflective of heaven's purity. The cloud is reflective of the coming forth of, presence of, or departure of divine glory. That is seen throughout Scripture, from Exodus to Revelation. When a divine manifestation of the Lord is given, a cloud is often noted. In this white cloud, John next says, "and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man."

This is the fulfillment of what was referred to in Revelation 1:7 –

> "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen."

And that is the fulfillment of the promise from Jesus in the gospels, such as –

> "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30** Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **31** And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."
>
> -Matthew 24:29-31

And those words of Jesus are given based on the words of the vision given to Daniel –

> "I was watching in the night visions,
> And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
> Coming with the clouds of heaven!
> He came to the Ancient of Days,
> And they brought Him near before Him." Daniel 7:13

Various other references complete the picture, but these three show the progression of thought enough to show that Christ Jesus is the anticipation and fulfillment of the passages.

In these words, Revelation 14 corresponds to the fourteenth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The fourteenth letter, nun, pictures seed, and it signifies "water," "seed," "continue," "heir," and "son." In verse 14 of this chapter is found the Son of Man prophesied of in Daniel 7:13. Of this Son of Man (Jesus) coming on the cloud, John next says, "having on His head a golden crown."

The crown described here is the Greek word *stephanos*. It can imply kingly authority such as when the crown of thorns was twisted together and placed on Christ's head. There they acknowledged that *stephanos* as a kingly symbol –

> "When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put *it* on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'" Matthew 27:29

Above all, the meaning of the *stephanos*, or crown, is that of glory, honor, and victory. Being gold signifies both royalty (in a human sense) and divinity (in a heavenly sense). Such symbolism goes back to the construction of the tabernacle where gold used in its construction bore these attributes.

This is Jesus, the Lord God Almighty, descending to accomplish a final task in the redemptive narrative before the coming of His millennial reign. As John says, "and in His hand a sharp sickle. The sickle is a symbol of judgment, as in cutting down one's enemies. The symbolism of this sickle in the hands of the Lord goes back to Joel 3 –

> "Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;
> For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.
> **13** Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.
> Come, go down;

For the winepress is full,
The vats overflow—
For their wickedness *is* great.
14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!
For the day of the LORD *is* near in the valley of decision.
15 The sun and moon will grow dark,
And the stars will diminish their brightness.
16 The LORD also will roar from Zion,
And utter His voice from Jerusalem;
The heavens and earth will shake;
But the LORD will be a shelter for His people,
And the strength of the children of Israel." Joel 3:12-16

Of this, Albert Barnes rightly notes, "The image of a harvest is often employed in the New Testament to describe moral subjects, Matthew 9:37-38; Matthew 13:30, Matthew 13:39; Mark 4:29; Luke 10:2; John 4:35. Here the reference is to the consummation of all things, when the great harvest of the world will be reaped..."

Life application: In Matthew 26, Jesus again refers to the symbolism of the Son of Man spoken of by Daniel. There it says –

"And the high priest arose and said to Him, 'Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?' **63** But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, 'I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!'
64 Jesus said to him, '*It is as* you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.'
65 Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, 'He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard
His blasphemy! **66** What do you think?'" Matthew 26:62-66

Knowing exactly what Jesus was referring to, the High Priest of Israel violated his own law by tearing his robe, thus failing to uphold the requirements of the office he held (Leviticus 21:10). At the same time, he stated that what Jesus said was blasphemy because His words could only mean that He was claiming to be God.

But Jesus is God. Israel rejected Him, and the message of the coming of the Lord to save His people has gone out among the world. Eventually, that dispensation will end with the rapture of the church. Already, the world is ripe for the harvest of the wrath of God.

When the church is taken out, things will devolve even more. At that time, Jesus is coming to execute the wrath of God in full measure.

He is the One appointed to judge the world in righteousness. He is great, He is God, He is JESUS!

Lord Jesus, how much better to bow the knee to You now and find grace and mercy in receiving what You have done for us. In Your word, we see that a time is coming when the world will be judged in righteousness, and it will be consumed in the fury of Your wrath. Give us a willing heart to share Your word now so that many may hear and be saved. Amen.

And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." Revelation 14:15

John just beheld One *like* the Son of Man on a white cloud, wearing a golden crown and having a sharp sickle in His hand. John next says, "And another angel came out of the temple."

The previous person was Christ Jesus in His role as the Victor (symbolized by the crown of victory) of the human race and the One to execute judgment on all men who fail to measure up to God's standard of perfection. He fulfills the role as the Son of Man who has authority to judge men impartially because He has shared in their manhood. This next "angel" is most probably another aspect of Christ. Coming out of the temple signifies Christ in His roles as High Priest and Mediator.

In coming out of the temple, John says He is, "crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud." The imagery is for our benefit to see the various roles of Christ. In Matthew 24, Jesus said that no man knows the day and hour of the events to come, "not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36). Jesus, as fully God, shares in the knowledge of the Godhead. The divine Christ, the God/Man, is being revealed in these various roles and how His actions are conducted in the stream of time.

In other words, seeing one angel – who is Jesus, calling forth to the Son of Man on the cloud – is an unveiling of the various roles of Christ to us. These are not separate entities in reality. They are a vision given to John to show us all that Christ does. This has already been seen in the various roles of Christ being displayed in this manner, such as in Revelation 5. With this understood, the call is made to Him who sat on the cloud, saying,

“Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

This is the harvest of the earth of those who are accepted by Christ the High Priest. First, the symbolism is found in Mark 4 –

> “And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, **27** and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. **28** For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. **29** But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’”
> -Mark 4:26-29

This is the good grain of the tribulation period. The one hundred and forty-four thousand were firstfruits. This is now the harvest. It is those who did not take the mark of the beast and who put their trust in Christ. As it said in 14:13, “Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on,” and “their works will follow them.”

In this harvest, there will be good and bad. There will certainly be some who do not take the mark of the beast for whatever reason, but they have not come to Christ. Those are referred to in another parable –

> “Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; **25** but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. **26** But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. **27** So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ **28** He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ **29** But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. **30** Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’” Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus gave various other parables that follow this same general theme. In the time of the coming kingdom, the harvest will take place. There will be good grain and there will be tares and chaff. Christ will sort it all out. The next verse will finish the thought of this harvest, and then after this harvest will come another type of harvest in the verses ahead, the grape harvest.

Life application: At harvest time, there are piles and piles of sheaves. The amount of seed seems impossible to ever count, so who would even try? And if some of the seed gets lost, who would even care – there is so much! The answer is that God knows every good seed of all humanity since the first man. He knows every bit of chaff as well. Nothing escapes His attention.

But more, of the good seed, none shall be lost, not even one. The harvest of mankind is so carefully and meticulously attended to by God, that no error will ever be made. All that are saved by Christ Jesus will be a part of His eternal reign. We should have no fear or worry. What God does is perfect, and what God has done in Christ cannot fail. We are saved with a sure and everlasting salvation because of the work of another. It comes through faith in JESUS!

Heavenly Father, there is an end to all things, including Your patience at the world's sin and rejection of You. Your word is written and therefore these things will come to pass. Give us willing hearts to stand up and proclaim the truth of Your message now. Help us to be responsible in getting this word out. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. Revelation 14:16

In the previous verse, the instruction was given – "Thrust in your sickle and reap." The time for the harvest is at hand. With that, John records, "So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth."

The word translated as "thrust," *balló*, is completely different than that of the previous verse, *pempó*. This word signifies to cast or throw. The previous word meant "to send." This word, *balló*, can give the sense of lesser actions, such as placing something. It was called for him to "send" his sickle forth, and in response, He has "cast" it forth.

What may be the case is that the One who sat on the cloud cast forth His sickle as a means of conveying to His angels that the time of harvest had come. The reason for this is that angels are specifically noted as participants in this harvest –

> "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. **38** The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one.* **39** The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. **40** Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. **41** The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and

those who practice lawlessness, [42] and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. [43] Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Matthew 13:37-43

The reaping of the harvest signifies preparation for the kingdom age. The good grain will be reaped and gathered in. At the same time, those who are as tares in the field will be separated and burned up. As John says, "and the earth was reaped."

This is the harvest of grain – both wheat and tares. The next harvest will be a completely different harvest. Wheat (faithful believers) and tares (false believers) will be separated at this time. The next harvest will be of those in the earth who simply rejected God's offer of Christ altogether. That will be seen next and will continue until the end of the chapter.

Life application: It should be remembered that what is being seen here is not dealing with the church. That who are in the church are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This is a pledge for the day of redemption, and the full redemption payment for us will be at the rapture (See Ephesians 1:13, 14). What is being seen now is that which is in accord with the symbolism Jesus spoke of in the gospels. It is dealing with the tribulation period.

Whereas now the church is predominantly Gentile focused, during the tribulation, the situation will be predominantly Israel focused. Keeping these categories straight is necessary to see how events will properly unfold.

Until our departure, those in the church should continue to tell the message of Christ to those in the world. In their receiving Him, there is the great hope that someday the Lord will return for His church. We shall be gathered to Him before the terrifying events of Revelation will take place. Let us hold fast to this hope, knowing that God has not appointed us to wrath, but to salvation through our great and glorious Lord, JESUS!

O God, You alone know the hearts and thoughts of man. You know the thoughts of each of us and how far from perfection and holiness they often are. We can look to the judgments the Bible says are coming in the end times as are recorded in Your word, and we can see that only by Your mercy we are saved from them. We deserve the same, and yet You have granted us peace with You because of Jesus' work. Thank You, O Lord. Amen.

Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. Revelation 14:17

Like in verse 15, John sees another angel coming "out of the temple which is in heaven." As before, it is most likely another vision of Christ in His mediatorial role; being God's true High Priest. The previous angel came from the temple, to direct the One like the Son of Man to harvest the earth. This is the wheat as noted from Jesus' parables. Now, another angel (possibly another manifestation of the Lord) will direct a different type of harvest.

For now, and like in verse 14, this angel has "a sharp sickle." The first harvest was symbolic of those who are the grain. In that harvest, the wheat is separated from the chaff, and the good stalks are separated from the tares. The next harvest will be emblematic of another type of judgment.

Life application: The book of Jude reveals that there will be many following the Lord in what this harvest signifies –

> "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, **15** to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.'" Jude 1:14, 15

The sickle in the hand of this angel is a clear indication that there will be a great harvest of God's wrath. The consequences of this harvest will be astonishing. That will be seen in the verses ahead. Times of great trial and woe are coming upon the earth for those who fail to make the right choice now. Be sure to be spared of this time of trial by putting your faith in Christ before it comes. He is the One God has designated to save His people. Great is the Lord God who redeems us. He is JESUS.

Heavenly Father, as Your word is written, we have every assurance that it will come about exactly as the details state. Help us to spread the word of peace concerning Jesus and to be faithful witnesses of His work now. When the rapture occurs, it will be too late. Our work will be finished. Give us hearts for the lost now. Amen.

And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." Revelation 14:18

John continues to describe the events surrounding the reaping of the earth. He first described the harvest of the earth, implying a grain harvest. That was in accord with several parables spoken by the Lord that referred to the end of the age. Another harvest is now to be described, the grape harvest. Of this, John says, “And another angel came out from the altar.”

As before, this could be an angel, meaning a created being, or it could be another manifestation of the Lord as He reveals His many roles to us through apocalyptic scenes. The latter is surely the case. The previous angel came out of the temple, indicating a High Priestly Role. This one comes out from the altar.

This would be the altar of incense, and it recalls the words of both Revelation 6 and 8 –

> “When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. **10** And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ **11** Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were,* was completed.” Revelation 6:9-11

> “Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw *it* to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.”
>
> -Revelation 8:5

The tribulation saints of Revelation 6 were told they had to rest until the number of saints to be killed was completed. With the coming of the mark of the beast, those refusing to take it will be killed in great numbers. Revelation showed the beginning of the judgments of these things during the trumpet judgments.

The angel is coming out from this altar of incense, signifying that it is surely another manifestation of Christ, the High Priest. He is the One who mediates the prayers of His saints to the Father. Of this scene before John, he next says, “who had power over fire.”

There is an article before “fire.” The Greek reads, “who had power over the fire.” The word translated as “power” signifies “power to act,” meaning “authority.” As the fire is what lights the incense (the prayers of the saints) and causes it to rise, this is telling us that the number of the saints to be killed is completed. The prayers are heard, they have reached their full number, and the world is to be judged. Thus, John says, “and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle.”

The loud cry is a cry of authority and direction. The time has come. Action against those who have martyred God's people is required because their numbers have reached their fullness, and their prayers will now be responded to. With this in mind, this angel (assumed to be the Lord Jesus) says, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth."

The word translated as "gather" is one that only refers to the gathering of grapes. It comes from a word meaning "to dry." Thus, it speaks of ripe fruit, ready to dry. These grapes are fully ripe. As the grapes signify the people of the earth, it means that they have heaped up their sins to the point that they are fully ripe for judgment. As the angel next says, "for her grapes are fully ripe."

It is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 3 –

> "Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;
> For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.
> **13** Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.
> Come, go down;
> For the winepress is full,
> The vats overflow—
> For their wickedness *is* great." Joel 3:12, 13

The wickedness of the people has reached its fullness. It is as if they will simply explode if they are allowed to continue anymore, and so they will be gathered by clusters. What lies ahead is a judgment so great that it will be incredible to even imagine, but the words have been written, and they will come to pass just as revealed in Revelation.

<u>Life application:</u> The grape harvest is a harvest of judgment. It is a time of wrath being poured out. Throughout history, and now particularly during the tribulation period, the prayers of those who have been martyred are calling out for judgment. Eventually, that time will come.

Like grapes filled with their juice, the people of the world will come to the point where they are so full of iniquity that no remedy will be left. Only punishment can be expected. When grapes are harvested, they are then taken and processed. In Isaiah 5:5, a similar thought is seen concerning the judgment upon Israel –

> "And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; *And* break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down."

This was speaking of the people of Israel (My vineyard) and the judgment they would receive. However, in Revelation, God has restored them to His land, and they are now the ones being protected while their enemies will face His judgment.

There is an end to the great patience of God. There is a time when sins fill up to the full measure and judgment must be executed. The grapes of God's wrath will be taken to the winepress and the blood of the nations will flow. As terrible as these verses sound, everything which is described as coming upon man is self-inflicted. We only have ourselves to blame for the judgment to come.

The saddest part of all, though, is that God has already extended His offer of peace to the world. He has sent His Son to take the punishment that we all deserve. Let us be wise. Let us receive this wonderful gift of reconciliation and peace with God before He comes as the Judge of the earth to trample out the grapes of wrath. He first came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. How do we want to face Him? Let us be wise. Let us turn today to our Lord and Savior. Let us turn to JESUS.

Lord God, of course You are loving and merciful. You give us beauty in nature and plenty at our tables. You give us the love of others and the joy of beautiful sunrises. And above all, You have given us Jesus as a gift and an offering of peace. How could we turn away from that? Help us to see rightly and to call out while the time of salvation is at hand. Amen.

So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. Revelation 14:19

In the previous verse, the order was given to harvest the fully ripe grapes. With that spoken forth, John records, "So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth." The idea is that of the Lord's judgment being directed to the spot on the earth where these calamitous events will take place. There, the fury of the Lord at the wickedness of man will find its release. As John next says, "and gathered the vine of the earth."

The meaning is that of the fruit of the vine, meaning the fully ripe grapes. The earth is set for judgment, the wickedness has reached its full measure, and the vine will be harvested. In this action, John next notes, "and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God."

The Greek reads more forcibly, "the winepress, the great *winepress*, of the wrath of God." A winepress is where wine is stomped out or crushed in some other manner. The judgment of the nations has come, and those who have rejected Jesus and come against

His people will be slain. The imagery seen here will be fully explained later in Revelation. At this time, we are being given a panoramic overview.

A wine press is a place where all the grapes were gathered for processing. There, they are stomped on or crushed in some other way in order to make them burst. In the previous verse, Joel 3 was cited, showing that this will be located in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, meaning "God judges."

In the end times, God is going to gather the nations of the world to one location and bring them into judgment. It will be in the place of God's judgment, and it will be because they have divided the land – God's land – which He has given it to the people of Israel.

In ancient times, once grapes were gathered into a single location, usually a large vat, there was a great celebration as the people came and stomped on them to release the juice from the ready-to-burst skins. As the grapes of this harvest symbolically represent people filled with wickedness, the imagery becomes obvious. There will be the utter destruction of countless numbers of people in this great battle of the future. Isaiah 63 ascribes the event, showing that it is the Lord's Messiah, Christ Jesus, who will accomplish this –

> "Who *is* this who comes from Edom,
> With dyed garments from Bozrah,
> This *One who is* glorious in His apparel,
> Traveling in the greatness of His strength?—
> 'I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.'
> **2** Why *is* Your apparel red,
> And Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?
> **3** 'I have trodden the winepress alone,
> And from the peoples no one *was* with Me.
> For I have trodden them in My anger,
> And trampled them in My fury;
> Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments,
> And I have stained all My robes.
> **4** For the day of vengeance *is* in My heart,
> And the year of My redeemed has come.
> **5** I looked, but *there was* no one to help,
> And I wondered
> That *there was* no one to uphold;
> Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me;

And My own fury, it sustained Me.
[6] I have trodden down the peoples in My anger,
Made them drunk in My fury,
And brought down their strength to the earth.'" Isaiah 63:1-6

Life application: The world at large generally looks at Jesus as a cosmic pushover. The focus is heavily on His forgiving nature. Their thought is that because He died for sin, sin can then be overlooked, and even reveled in. But this attitude dismisses His righteousness. The fact that He died for sin demonstrates that sin is appalling to Him.

God has offered peace to all people through the death of His Son. It is an offer for forgiveness of the sins we have committed. Either our sins are judged in Him at the cross of Calvary, or they will be judged in us individually. The choice is ours, let us take heed and accept His great forgiveness now.

God has provided the way of peace and reconciliation with Him, but someday, that same One will come again. When He does, it will not be to atone for sin, but to judge it. He is the One that God has appointed for all such matters related to sin. He is JESUS.

Lord Jesus, I stand in awe of the love You have for the people of the world. What we rightly deserve is to be destroyed through judgment and wrath because of our sins. But You have offered us reconciliation with God through Your own shed blood. What a great, tender, and loving Lord! I accept Your offer – Yes, I accept the cross of Calvary for my sin-debt. Amen.

And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.
Revelation 14:20

The description of this verse follows in thought with the previous two so closely that they should be read together –

"And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." [19] So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God. [20] And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs."

The imagery is that of immense carnage as the wrath of God is unleashed upon those who are to be destroyed. John writes, “And the winepress was trampled outside the city.” The city here is Jerusalem, not Babylon. This will be seen later as the location of the battle is named in Chapter 16. Of this coming carnage, John next says, “and blood came out of the winepress.”

The imagery has gone from grapes (that are full of juice) to humans (that area full of blood). In other words, the imagery of the grapes is that of humans being crushed as if they were tossed into a giant press. Hence, the symbolism from Isaiah 63, cited in the previous verse, is that of the Lord stomping on His enemies and splattering His garments with blood. So great will be the issue of blood that John says it will flow “up to the horses’ bridles.”

The height of a horse’s bridle is about four feet. The reason for including this particular measurement is probably because of what it says in Revelation 19 –

> “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. **12** His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. **13** He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. **14** And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.” Revelation 19:11-14

In other words, the measurement is given as a prophetic advance. John is seeing the vision of the height in relation to the horses now, but the description of the return of the Lord with the armies of heaven will only come later. Of this flow of blood, John says it will flow “for one thousand six hundred furlongs.”

A furlong is six hundred six- and three-quarter feet. Thus, there are eight furlongs in a mile. One thousand six hundred furlongs would equal two hundred miles. The amount of blood required for this to occur depends on several factors. One analysis is linked HERE to show how few bodies it actually takes to produce this much blood.

However, this only takes into account the two measurements. Is this speaking of a flow one foot wide? Is it a flow ten feet wide? And so on. It also does not account for blood soaking into the earth, and etc. The idea of the vision that John is describing is that of bodies heaped upon bodies and blood flowing out of them, even filling the entire area where they have been gathered.

The number itself, one thousand six hundred, is a multiple of four (four x four hundred). Four is the world number. Four hundred is the product of eight and fifty, and is "a divinely perfect period" (Bullinger). Hence, the judgment upon the world has come at its appointed time. The battle will be complete in its effectiveness in destroying the enemy, and when it is over, a new era will be ushered in.

Life application: Later in Revelation, this battle will be called Armageddon. The book of Joel says that it will be in the valley of Jehoshaphat – the valley where the Lord Judges.

Because this is a battle being waged by humans, it involves their own free will to come into this valley to fight. In other words, God is looking into the future and sees the inevitable result of how things will turn out because of human wickedness and a rejection of following His warnings. Israel is the key to these prophetic events. Thus, the eschatological (or "end times") view of prophecy, which sees the land and the people of Israel being at the center stage of prophecy, is the only one that makes sense.

And God knowing all things in advance has returned His people to their land to bring about the astonishing fulfillment of these things. The grape harvest, which is this great battle, will come about as the armies of the world come into the land and engage in combat outside Jerusalem – geographically centered among the nations and also literally centered as the focus of the Bible.

As noted above, the symbolism of the winepress becomes clear in this verse. The "wine" is symbolic of blood. The pressing of the grapes represents the death of the humans engaged in this battle.

The battle, as is recorded here, has never occurred in the past. Thus, two main options must be considered. The first is to say that this is merely symbolic of God's judgment, or the second is to say that the words are to be taken literally. Either option is possible, but due to the size of the land, the layout as it is described, the numbers and descriptions provided, and so on, the scope of the battle should probably be taken at face value.

Hence, the scene described here should be taken to represent actual numbers in a real battle that will really be waged in the land of Israel. The Day of the Lord is coming, and even now the news reports of the world are beginning to show the move toward their completion.

As this is so, the rapture of the church is coming closer each moment. The events of human history are coming to a climax, and what once seemed unlikely and only symbolic of something else now seems both possible and realistic. Let us take stock of

our lives, consider our eternal destiny, and turn to God now – before it is too late. He has made the offer of peace and reconciliation. Let us be wise and accept it now. Let us turn to JESUS!

Lord God, You already know what is coming. The span of time is meeting up with recorded prophecy so that the two appear to be meeting in the near future. You also know each and every soul who will be saved from and out of those things. We can trust that You are working out a great salvation even in the face of coming global disaster. Help each of us to do our part to share the message of love and redemption found in the Person of Jesus before that day arrives. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. Revelation 15:1

Chapter 14 ended with the vision of the harvest of the grapes being cast into the winepress of God and being trampled out. With that complete, John's attention is once again directed, saying, "Then I saw another sign in heaven."

The last time a similar statement was made was in Chapter 12 with the sign of the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. That was immediately followed by the sign of the great fiery red dragon.

As in Chapter 12, the contents of this chapter will be a type of brief interlude. Before that occurs, however, John will first see a precursor concerning the subject which will follow. This sign is, as John says, "great and marvelous."

The word translated as "marvelous" signifies something awe-evoking. It is something that will move "the beholder to their deepest emotions" (HELPS Word Studies). It will be used one more time in verse 15:3. John next says what the sign is, saying, "seven angels having the seven last plagues." The Greek reads more precisely – "angels seven having plagues seven: the last."

There was the breaking of the seals and there was the sounding of the trumpets. Now, another course of plagues is set to come upon the earth. In them, there is finality to the process. Of these plagues, John next tells the reader why these are the last seven plagues with the words "for in them the wrath of God is complete."

The Greek reads with an aorist verb, "was complete." This is known as a prophetic aorist. What John is seeing is as if it is already accomplished. Even if the details are coming later, the vision is as if already fully displayed. The description of them, however, will be presented in succession for the reader to follow along.

In the presentation of these seven angels, the fulfillment of all of the calamities of the tribulation period will be ended. In beholding this, John is awestruck.

Life application: As will be seen, the coming judgment will be in the form of bowls. Some translations say "vials," but these are large containers signifying a great amount of outpouring. The actual outpouring will start in chapter 16.

How often has the cliché been stated, “I believe in the loving God of the New Testament, but not in the wrathful God of the Old Testament.” This type of naïveté stems from people who have never taken the time to read the Bible. The same God is portrayed in both Testaments – He doesn’t change and there isn’t more than one God.

In both Testaments, we see all of God’s attributes – His love, grace, mercy, righteousness, justice, holiness, and truth. None of the attributes are elevated above any others. Instead, they stem from, and define, His very nature. God can’t sacrifice His justice in order to be loving. He can’t give up His righteousness in order to be merciful. All of His attributes must be satisfied in His dealings with man.

Only at the cross are all men reconciled. Therefore, it is the cross where God’s holy nature has been met on our behalf. If we reject the cross, then the wrath that was poured out on His Son must be poured out on us. Such is the nature of God, and such is the reason that there is only one way to be reconciled to Him. This is through faith and the accepting of the Gift of His Son, JESUS.

Lord, You have shown us the path to peace by sending Your Son in the likeness of man and then making Him the atoning sacrifice for our sins. As amazing as it is, so many fail to accept this glorious offer of peace. In this, they remain outside of Your mercy. Please give us the wisdom, words, and desire to be able to rightly explain the significance of the cross to others so that they may be saved. Amen.

And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. Revelation 15:2

John just saw the vision of the seven angels having the seven last plagues. His eyes now redirect to a glorious sight, and he writes, “And I saw *something* like a sea of glass.” In verse 4:6, it is said that there was a sea of glass before the throne, like crystal. In 13:1, a beast was rising up out of the sea. In 17:1, there will be the great harlot who sits on many waters.

In these visions, one can see the difference between the peaceful, translucent sea of heaven and the chaotic sea of humanity. Like in verse 4:6, the word translated as “glass” is an adjective. Therefore, it more rightly says, “a glassy sea.” The word describes the appearance, not the material. It isn’t that the sea is solid glass, but it is as smooth and tranquil as glass. The description here speaks of purity and clarity. Because of the contrast to the sea of fallen humanity, it must also speak of tranquility and calm. Along with this, John says it is “mingled with fire.”

As fire speaks of judgment and purification, this fire most probably reflects the purification process that the martyrs, next to be mentioned, received. As John says, "and those who have the victory over the beast." The words are not in accord with the Greek. In the Greek, the verb is a present participle. It more rightly says, "and those conquering out of the beast."

They were under the rule and authority of the beast. And yet, in their refusal to submit to taking the mark or worshiping the beast, they were conquering out of the beast. It demonstrates the superlative nature of their victory and the putting of allegiance to Christ above their own lives. This is evidenced in the next words as John then says, "over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name."

This was the requirement for life under the beast – submission. They were to worship his image, and they were to acknowledge that allegiance by accepting "the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (13:17). Any person who would not worship the image was to be killed (13:15), and any person who would not receive the mark could not buy or sell (13:17).

The irony of the plight of the people under the beast is that if they submit to him, they will find life that leads to death, but for those who rather submit to Christ, they will find death that leads to life. Those who follow after the beast will avoid the judgment of the beast, but they will face the judgment of God apart from Christ. Those who submit only to Christ will receive the judgment of the beast, but they will then be imputed Christ's righteousness purchased at the cross of Christ.

Of these who are conquering out of the beast, John says they are "standing on the sea of glass." The Greek again uses the same adjective as before, reading, "standing on the sea of the glassy." Here the verb is a perfect participle. They are conquering out of the beast, and they are standing upon the glassy sea. There is total victory for them as they are purified by their faith in Christ and as they now stand in that state in a place of tranquility.

In these words, Revelation 15 corresponds to the fifteenth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet. The fifteenth letter, *samech*, pictures a thorn. It signifies "grab," "hate," and "protect." It has the literal meaning of "a support." In this verse is found the sea of glass upon which those who refuse the mark stand, representing their support. John then says of them, "having harps of God."

The harps have been seen in verse 5:8 with the twenty-four elders. They were again seen in 14:2 with the "harpists playing their harps" when the one hundred and forty-

four thousand stood on Mount Zion with the Lamb. They are mentioned again now. In the next verse, the purpose of the harps will be seen.

Life application: In verse 14:13, John recorded the words – "Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on." The people seen in this verse are those very people. They were willing to die for the sake of eternal life, rather than throw their allegiance in with the devil and his crew. They are in a place of calm and serenity, having been purified and are acceptable to God for worship.

At the end of the tribulation period, these souls will receive the physical resurrection of the dead, and they will never be able to die again. It is a fitting and wondrous reward for their willingness to die for the sake of the gospel, instead of living for the sake of temporary life on earth.

The Bible stands as a witness to the faithful workings of God in redemptive history, calling people back to Himself through the giving of His Son. Let us be wise. Let us call out for His saving offer. Let us call out today for JESUS.

Heavenly Father, even now – before the time of tribulation – we have many hard choices to make. Walking with and in Jesus Christ is not always easy, but it is of infinite worth. Thank You for calling us out of darkness and into Your marvelous light. And we pray for those who are currently facing the same decision. May they do what is right by calling on Jesus! Amen.

They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:
"Great and marvelous are Your works,
Lord God Almighty!
Just and true *are* Your ways,
O King of the saints! Revelation 15:3

John just noted those "who have victory over the beast, over his image and *over* his mark and over the number of his name." He also noted that they had harps of God. Of them, he now says, "They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God." The term "servant of God" is fittingly applied to Moses, having been called the Lord's servant several times in the Old Testament (see Exodus 14:31, Numbers 12:7, and Psalm 105:26). He is referred to in this manner in Hebrews 3:5 as well.

Of this, Ruckman says, "Here is another verse that proves that no Christian goes through the Tribulation. The people in verse 2 [sic] sing 'the song of Moses' (the Mosaic Law) and

'the song of the Lamb' (Jesus Christ dying for sinners – John 1:29). That's *works and faith* ... No Christian has any business singing 'the Song of Moses" at all."

While it is true that pre-tribulation Christian believers will not go through the tribulation (in part or in whole), the logic Ruckman uses is faulty. Citing the Song of Moses is not a works-based statement. Rather, it is a note of fulfilled prophecy.

There are two songs of Moses recorded in the Old Testament. The first is in Exodus 15 when the children of Israel were led out of bondage and through the Red Sea to safety. The great world power that had hold over Israel was crushed and defeated by the Lord. The second is recorded in Deuteronomy 31 and 32. It details the history of the people of Israel from the time they enter the Promised Land through to the end of the ages. Which Song of Moses is being referred to? Actually, both fit the mold of what is said. However, it is surely the latter song that is first and foremost being considered.

The people in this verse are "those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name." In the final verse of the song recorded in Deuteronomy 32, we read these words –

> "Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people;
> For He will avenge the blood of His servants,
> And render vengeance to His adversaries;
> He will provide atonement for His land *and* His people." Deuteronomy 32:43

To ensure we don't make the error Ruckman has made, Paul even cites this verse, speaking of believers in the church age, in Romans 15:10. Moses prophesied of a time when the Gentiles would rejoice along with the people of Israel. That time came when Christ fulfilled and set aside the Mosaic Covenant, and established the New Covenant in His blood.

Further, the words of Deuteronomy 32 refer to avenging "the blood of His servants." This is exactly what is being pictured as these martyrs stand on the glassy sea. Thus, both Jews and Gentiles can sing the Song of Moses (Rejoice, O Gentiles with His people), "and the song of the Lamb" (You are worthy to take the scroll...) as is recorded in Revelation 5:9, 10.

Of the words "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb," Vincent's Word Studies says, "There are not two distinct songs. The song of Moses is the song of the Lamb." This is true in the sense that all of the words of Moses ultimately refer to the work of God in Christ. Thus, songs such as are found in Exodus 15,

Deuteronomy 32, and Revelation 5 all build upon the same theme – the greatness of the Lord God.

Of this song, these people on the glassy sea are "saying: 'Great and marvelous are Your works.'" It is a note of great exultation and awed wonder at the workings of God in Christ. This is not merely a praise to God for what He has created, but what He has done within the created order. It speaks of the redemptive process that began at the fall of man and which continues through the tribulation period itself. The words follow after other such praises recorded in the Old Testament, such as Psalm 111:2, Psalm 139:14, and 1 Chronicles 16:9. These praises are to the "Lord God Almighty!"

The Greek reads *Kyrie ho Theos ho Pantokratōr* – "Lord the God the Almighty." The word *Pantokratōr*, or "Almighty," was used in Revelation 1:8 when referring to Jesus. It was used again in verse 4:8 where it was clearly referring to Jesus again. And then again, in verse 11:17, it is used when referring to Jesus. Each of these uses can clearly be identified as referring to Jesus from the surrounding context. The same is true here. It is God, working in Christ, that is on display in this song now being set forth before us. John continues with, "Just and true are Your ways."

This is a note of God's dealings with humanity. Though these are a part of the very nature of God, there is no need for justice and truth to be spoken of in relation to the creation apart from man. Only man is cognizant of the intimate relationship that should exist between him and his Creator. Of His just nature, the words are reflective of Romans 3 –

> "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, **22** even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, **26** to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."
>
> -Romans 3:21-26

Of His truthful nature, the words are reflective of Romans 2 –

> "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice

the same things. **2** But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things." Romans 2:1, 2

In God, there is only justice and truth. With this stated, the verse finishes with, "O King of the saints!" In these words, there is a variation in manuscripts. Some say "saints" while others say "nations." This may be a citation from Jeremiah 10:7. If so, then "nations" is the preferred reading. That will be seen in the analysis of the coming verse.

In the end, both are true at the end of the tribulation. At this time, Christ is the King of the saints, having called a people to Himself in holiness. When the tribulation period ends (which is presupposed by this song), Christ will rule over all nations. This is clearly seen in the 2nd Psalm, but it is also explicitly stated in Isaiah 2 (and as is repeated in Micah 4) –

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD's house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it.
3 Many people shall come and say,
"'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths.'
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." Isaiah 2:2, 3

Life application: Ultimately, God is the One who delivers His people, but he used Moses to lead the people of Israel, and He came in the Person of Jesus to redeem all of the people of the world – becoming our sacrificial Lamb in order to redeem us from the power of sin and death. The tribulation saints will be a mixture of both Jew and Gentile. Together, they will sing a song of both Moses and the Lamb with the praise being directed to the Lord God Almighty.

In the Old Testament, the "Almighty" is El Shaddai who first appeared to Abraham. He is the God of power and protection. The people sing of his just and true ways because it is He who has both the right and the authority to judge the world in righteousness. As the King of the saints, He is the One who rules over His redeemed. Paul says that in order to be saved one must "call on the name of the Lord." This act acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Lord over all things, and thus our Sovereign, our King.

If you are struggling with the deity of Jesus Christ, all you need to do is to compare terminology throughout the Bible, which describes God and which also describes Jesus. The Bible consistently bestows upon Jesus the same terminology that is given to God (or the Lord, meaning YHVH, of the Old Testament). There can be no mistaking who Jesus reveals and who He is. Have faith and don't be misdirected by those who haven't taken the time or effort to determine the truth of the second member of the Trinity. He is the God/Man. He is JESUS!

Surely, You are great and glorious O God! From You comes all power, honor, glory, and majesty. To You we look for our protection and provision. We also come to You in gratitude for every good blessing that flows from Your open hand of grace. Yes! Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God Almighty. Hallelujah and Amen.

Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For *You* alone *are* holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested." Revelation 15:4

The song of praise now continues completing what the saints had begun in the previous verse. It is "the Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." It is now sung by the people who have "victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name." They are rejoicing with harps at the greatness of God, His works and His ways.

Because He is the King of the saints (or nations – see analysis of the previous verse), the question is asked "Who shall not fear You." The question was asked by Jeremiah who referred to the Lord as the "King of the nations," saying –

> "Who would not fear You, O King of the nations?
> For this is Your rightful due.
> For among all the wise *men* of the nations,
> And in all their kingdoms,
> *There is* none like You." Jeremiah 10:7

The idea here is that of reverence for the Lord because He is ultimately the leader of the nations. This will be evidenced in the judgment that lies ahead. It is He who directs nations, sets them up, and tears them down. For this, He is to be feared, and a sense of awe should be in the hearts of all who contemplate His abilities and capabilities. John next writes, "O Lord, and glorify your name."

This is reflective of the words of Psalm 86 –

> "Among the gods *there is* none like You, O Lord;
> Nor *are there any works* like Your works.
> **9** All nations whom You have made
> Shall come and worship before You, O Lord,
> And shall glorify Your name.
> **10** For You *are* great, and do wondrous things;
> You alone *are* God." Psalm 86:8-10

Not only is the Lord the King of the nations (or saints), but the psalmist acknowledges that there is but one God. All other "gods" are false, and so the Lord alone is to receive praise, worship, adoration, and fear. He alone is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. And more, John says, "For *You* alone *are* holy."

It is a thought reflected in the book of Job, such as –

> "If *God* puts no trust in His saints,
> And the heavens are not pure in His sight,
> **16** How much less man, *who is* abominable and filthy,
> Who drinks iniquity like water!" Job 15:15

Job's point is that there is nothing, not the heavens or even His heavenly host, that compares to Him. He is set apart from all things (holy) and is thus worthy of all attention, praise, glory, and honor. As these things are so, John continues with, "For all nations shall come and worship before You."

It was just cited in the verses from Psalm 86 (above), and it is also reflected in the words of the prophets Isaiah and Micah. There is a time ahead where the knowledge of whom the Lord is will be found throughout the entire world. There will no longer be false religions that pursue false gods. But instead, all nations will come before the Lord in Jerusalem to worship Him and honor Him alone. With that stated, John finishes the words of the song, saying, "For Your judgments have been manifested."

The word translated as "judgments" signifies that which is righteous. A more literal rendering would be "righteousnesses." As Vincent's Word Studies notes, these are, "Not merely divine decisions, but righteous acts generally." Those acts of the Lord in judgment, in conduct, in how He has dealt with the sin of man and the waywardness of the nations, and so on, are made manifest to the people of the world.

The verb in this clause, being aorist, is stating these things as accomplished even though it is looking forward to what lies ahead. When all is complete, everything the Lord has done will vindicate His just, holy, and righteous nature.

Life application: Holiness is one of the attributes of God. It defines His very nature. He is completely separate from impurity, and nothing unclean can enter His presence.

Because we are, by nature, fallen creatures, we must be covered in Jesus' righteousness in order to enter into the presence of God. Were it not so, we would be completely consumed. But God has provided a way and the cost was high – it came through the life of His Son in exchange for our defilement. When the world finally comes to this understanding, all nations shall come and worship before Him, glorifying Him for who He is and for what He has done.

The redeemed of the world will look to the greatness of what God alone has done and acknowledge that He is worthy of all honor, glory, praise, and worship. But before that time, judgment will come upon all – both believers and unbelievers. The judgment of believers will be for rewards and losses. The judgment of unbelievers will be for condemnation.

When these judgments come, they will be completely impartial and absolutely fair. No person will be able to claim what was received was unjust. Absolute righteousness will be executed by the Creator. The world will see and understand the marvel of what God did in the sending of His Son to reconcile all things to Himself. The world will finally come to a full understanding of the glory of His Christ, our Lord JESUS.

Lord God, we know that judgment is coming on all flesh. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we don't fear condemnation, but we know we let you down from day to day. We know that Your judgment of our actions and lives will be completely just and fair, and so we can only praise You for what we receive. Before that time though, help us to be stronger and more faithful servants to You. Amen.

After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. Revelation 15:5

Due to the structure of the words in many translations, it isn't clear what is being opened or where. A more literal rendering comes from Young's translation –

> "And after these things I saw, and lo, opened was the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony in the heaven;"

It is the sanctuary (the temple) that is opened in the heaven. Also, the words "the tabernacle of the testimony" can also be translated "the tabernacle of the witness" (see Numbers 7:17). Understanding these things, the verse starts with a new part of his ongoing vision, saying, "After these things."

This is after the verses concerning those standing on the glassy sea who had victory over the beast, over his image, mark, and number of his name. With that complete, John's eyes are redirected, and he says, "I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony."

The wording seems a bit cumbersome, but it is very specific. The "tabernacle of the testimony" is that which was made by Moses in the wilderness as is meticulously recorded in Exodus. The "temple" of this tabernacle is the Most Holy Place. The words are saying that this Most Holy Place of the tabernacle of the testimony is what is being opened.

The word translated as "tabernacle" is *skéné*. It signifies a tent, dwelling, habitation, and so on. The tabernacle of the Law of Moses was the edifice where the holy and most holy objects were placed. The holy place is where the priests would minister each day with incense and the maintaining of the menorah. The table of showbread was there also, and it was changed out weekly. Dividing that room from the next room (the Most Holy Place) was a veil. Only the high priest could go into this room, and he could only do so once a year – on the Day of Atonement. Further, he could never enter without blood.

All of these things pictured Christ and His work. As Hebrews notes –

> "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer. **4** For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; **5** who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See *that* you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." Hebrews 8:3-5

The tabernacle and all of the implements associated with it were only types, shadows, and representations of what actually is in heaven. That is why John's words of this verse end with, "in heaven was opened." As noted from Young's translation, there is an article before "heaven." It should more rightly say, "in the heaven was opened." With this, we are seeing a vision of the heavenly things of which the earthly were only shadows.

This Most Holy Place, where the Ark of the Testimony is kept, is what is being opened. If no person, but the high priest could enter the earthly sanctuary under pain of death, and if even the high priest had to take the blood of the atonement into the Most Holy Place, lest he die, then what is the anticipated result of the opening of the true Most Holy Place in the heaven?

Remember, everything about the Old Covenant was given as typology of the true workings of God in Christ in the heavenly realms. How can the world escape judgment when the people are exposed to the righteous requirements of God without the covering of Christ! Remember, the previous vision was of those who had received Christ and were saved by faith in Him. The order of the vision is specific to now show what will be the judgment upon those who submitted to the beast. The words of this short vision will prepare the reader for the coming judgments upon them.

Life application: As noted above, no one was allowed access to the Most Holy Place (also called the Holy of Holies) where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, under the pain of death. However, when Jesus died on the cross, the veil was torn in two signifying that access to God was restored – completely and openly – to all people through His shed blood. So, the question is: "Why is judgment coming out of here in the form of seven angels with the seven last plagues if access has been restored?"

The answer is that the people of the earth have, at this point in the narrative, rejected the means of access – through the blood of Christ. Because of this, anyone who attempts to access God's throne without this is subject to the full weight and penalty of God's wrath. Jesus is the access to peace with God, but He is also the executor of the wrath of God when access through Him is rejected. Without the covering of the blood of Christ, the full weight of the law must be executed upon the unrepentant world.

This, once again, shows us that God's Messiah is the one and only path to salvation. Apart from Him, only judgment and condemnation awaits. But thank God that He sent His Christ into the world to cover His people with His own shed blood. In this, peace, propitiation, and restoration are found. Thank God for our Lord JESUS.

Lord, You fulfilled the law that we couldn't fulfill, and then You offered Yourself as a sacrifice on our behalf. When we accept the cross as our place for the remission of sins, then we have access to God, but without it, we only expose ourselves to the just penalty of our rejection. Thank You that Your life was given in exchange for our sin. All glory to You Lord! Amen.

And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Revelation 15:6

The previous verse noted that "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened." With that noted, it next says, "And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues." It is reflective of the words of verse 8:2 –

> "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets."

Like there, it is debated who these angels are or represent. One thought is that they correspond to "the seven Spirits who are before His throne" of Revelation 1:4. It is the Lamb who opened the seven seals, releasing those judgments upon the earth. Likewise, it was probably the seven Spirits who were represented by the seven angels blowing the trumpets. This seems possible because the seven Spirits of God that are possessed by the Lord Jesus (see Revelation 3:1) are His "angels," meaning "messengers," of destruction upon the world that has rejected Him.

However, it must be noted that one of these seven angels is reintroduced in Revelation 21:9 and he continues to talk to John into Revelation 22. At one point he says, "See *that you do* not *do that.* For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God" (22:9). This seems to overthrow the notion that they are the seven Spirit of the Lord.

As these angels are to "pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth" (16:1), the thought of these angels representing the Lord has precedence in the Old Testament –

> "How long, LORD?
> Will You be angry forever?
> Will Your jealousy burn like fire?
> **6** Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You,
> And on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name.
> **7** For they have devoured Jacob,
> And laid waste his dwelling place." Psalm 79:5-7

The pouring out of God's wrath is also noted in 2 Chronicles 34:21 & 25, Psalm 69:24, Ezekiel 21:31 & 22:31, and Hosea 5:10. These and other references give a good clue that the seven angels are, again, representative of the seven Spirits of the Lord pouring out His wrath upon the world. The wrath is described as "plagues," and each plague will be

described in Chapter 16 as the bowl is poured out. These seven angels are next described by John, saying, “clothed in pure bright linen.”

There is a variation in some manuscripts. Instead of λίνον (linen), some manuscripts say λίθον (stone). If linen, it symbolizes sinless perfection, purity, and righteousness. It is a theme already seen numerous times in Revelation. If precious stone is intended, then it follows after the analogy found in Ezekiel 28:13 when describing the king of Tyre –

> “You were in Eden, the garden of God;
> Every precious stone *was* your covering:
> The sardius, topaz, and diamond,
> Beryl, onyx, and jasper,
> Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.”

The stone symbolism was also found in Revelation 2:17 –

> “And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it.*”

From this, John finishes the verse with, “and having their chests girded with golden bands.”

It is reflective of the words of verse 1:13, which said, “and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.” The gold bands represent divine/kingly authority to judge righteously.

There is a difference in this verse and in the words of verse 1:13. In verse 1:13, it used the Greek word *mastos*, or breasts. Here it uses the Greek word *stéthos*, or chest. Despite this, both words signify the same area, and they convey the same general thought. Thus, this does not argue against one interpreting the other.

<u>Life application:</u> What is coming with the pouring out of the bowls will be similar to the trumpet judgments but seemingly more severe. However, some look at the judgments as the same, but being represented from different viewpoints. In other words, the trumpets are viewed from an earthly vantage point as they blow upwards, and the bowls are from a heavenly vantage point as they are poured downwards.

It seems though that they are coming in sequence, and that they are similar, but not the same judgments. The trumpets were plagues of warning; the bowls are plagues of

finality. What was rejected – in what occurred in the trumpets as divine judgment, and needing repentance – will be executed in complete and full strength in the outpouring of these bowls.

The times of tribulation are coming to their completion, and the world will suffer greatly because of their own foolish choices. What has been offered through God's giving of His Son is rejected and only judgment is left. The world has long thought of the Lord as a cosmic pushover. They will find out that He is the Lord who Judges. He is JESUS.

O God, it seems hard to understand how anyone could look around and not see that the calamities of the coming tribulation period are anything but divine judgment. And yet, they will fail to open their eyes, refuse to call out for Jesus, and they will be judged for their unrighteousness. All we can do is say that You are right in Your judgments. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. Revelation 15:7

The previous verse introduced the seven angels having the seven plagues full of the wrath of God. John now begins this verse with, "Then one of the four living creatures." This refers back to Chapter 4. In that chapter, a meticulous description was given of each of the four creatures around the throne. One of them now gives "the seven angels seven golden bowls."

These are shallow, flat bowls. The term "vials" which is given by some translations doesn't really convey that thought. The word is *phialé*. One can see the etymological root of the word vial in it, but the word vial as is used today does not convey the idea of what is being seen. It is the same word used in verse 5:8 –

> "Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

In that verse, the bowls were used in offering the incense, signifying the prayers of the saints. Using the same type of bowl now, it appears to be an ironic response to those prayers. Whereas the prayers were offered out of those bowls to God, and as they are containing the prayers of the saints, these bowls are said to be "full of the wrath of God."

These bowls now certainly include payment for all of the injustices done to God's people and all of the other wickedness that has been propagated by the world. Finally, John says in reference to God that it is He "who lives forever and ever."

The term is referring to Jesus. The same wording was used of Him in verse 1:18. The reason for including this term now is that though wickedness has grown to the highest levels on the earth, and that man feels God is completely removed from the picture, the opposite is true. God was, He is, and He shall be. He is eternal, and His seeming slowness to act is because man is limited and looks at things from his own perspective. He fails to take into account the fact that God has a program set forth that spans millennia. God is not slow to act at all. Rather, He is always in the process of working out His plans.

Life application: In man's attempt to cast off God's rule, his vile conduct will grow to the point where only judgment and punishment is left as a remedy. This was seen at the time of Noah, it has been seen again and again in the history of man since then, and it is coming upon the whole world someday.

The focal point of all judgment is the Lord's Christ. He came to take upon Himself the judgment of His people. In the tribulation period, it is He who will execute judgment on man who has rejected Him. In the end, God's judgment must be executed upon sin. And that judgment is realized in one way or another through the giving of JESUS.

Lord, it is terrifying to know that a time is coming when there will be no remedy left for the people of the world except that they are to receive judgment, punishment, and condemnation. Give each of us a heart willing to tell of Jesus' great act of love and reconciliation now, so that those around us can hear and hopefully call out to You and be saved. Make us instruments of sharing this wonderful message of reconciliation and peace, O God. Amen.

The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. Revelation 15:8

The seven angels were just given the seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God. With that done, it next says, "The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power." It is almost universal that commentaries equate this event with the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle/temple in passages such as Exodus 40:34, 1 Kings 8:10, and so on.

However, there is a difference. Here it is smoke, not a cloud. At times, smoke is associated with the Lord in the Old Testament –

> "Smoke went up from His nostrils,
> And devouring fire from His mouth;
> Coals were kindled by it." Psalm 18:8

A closer parallel is found in Isaiah 6:4 –

> "And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke."

Isaiah 1-5, again and again, referred to the waywardness of the people. Mixed into those passages are notes of restoration, but the thought of Isaiah 6 is based on a need for judgment before any restoration is possible. The scene of Isaiah 6 is one of terror and fear for the prophet.

In the New Testament, the word *kapnos*, or smoke, is used thirteen times. It is always used in one of two contexts – 1) the prayers of the saints (Revelation 8:4), or 2) smoke in connection with wrath and impending or executed judgment. In this case, it is said to be in connection with "the glory of God," but it is not in a harmonious and propitious way as it is with the cloud. Instead, the glory here is that of the awesome, avenging power of God.

It is as if the smoke of the incense (the prayers of the saints of those martyred) filled the temple, God breathed it in acknowledging the wrong done to them, and the smoke is converted into His fury. As these are bowls of wrath, what will occur is not a harmonious fellowship between God and His people as with the cloud, but an outpouring of great and severe judgment. With that thought in mind, John next says, "and no one was able to enter the temple."

This is what happened in both Exodus at the consecration of the tabernacle, and again in 1 Kings at the consecration of the temple –

> "Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of
> the LORD filled the tabernacle. **35** And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle
> of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the
> tabernacle." Exodus 40:34, 35

> "And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy *place,* that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, **11** so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD." 1 Kings 8:10, 11

These events were not of wrath and judgment, but of pure holiness communing with the subjects of His affection. Despite the Lord's willingness to dwell among His people, it was a sign that there was still a barrier between the two because of His holiness and glory. On the other hand, what is occurring in Revelation is that of the welling up of fury over the heaped-up sins of the people of the world. Of this, Milligan rightly says, "God cannot be approached at the moment when He is revealing Himself in all the terrors of His indignation." This state of wrath will continue, as John says, "till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."

The fury of the Lord will continue until it is spent. It will not abate at all until that time. The pouring out of the bowls reflects this pouring out of His wrath. Until the full measure of that has been brought to bear upon the world, the temple will remain inaccessible to all. If this is so in the temple of the Lord, what will it be like for those on the earth? Amos gives insight into that day –

> "Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!
> For what good *is* the day of the LORD to you?
> It *will be* darkness, and not light.
> **19** It *will be* as though a man fled from a lion,
> And a bear met him!
> Or *as though* he went into the house,
> Leaned his hand on the wall,
> And a serpent bit him!
> **20** *Is* not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light?
> *Is it not* very dark, with no brightness in it?" Amos 5:18-20

<u>Life application:</u> The horrifying meaning of there being no access to the temple is that no intercession will be possible. The people of the earth will receive judgment without mercy.

God's anger will have reached its full measure. The cross of His Son, and the wrath that was poured out there, has been rejected. Because of this, those left on the earth will receive in full strength the very punishment and anger that could have been satisfied for them in the death of Jesus. When it comes, they will of course blame God for their woes. But what is coming is a self-inflicted judgment.

Any and all are welcome at the cross, but people would rather ignore God's great offer of peace to work out their own wickedness. God is one hundred percent just in the pouring out of His anger during this period, and no one will have a legitimate claim against Him. Now is the time to be reconciled to God. Now is the time to call on JESUS.

Lord, when bad things happen in our lives, we find it ever so easy to blame You. But when things are going well and all is fine, we ignore You, hide from You, and even run from You. Help us to think clearly, and to rationally see that every good thing we have comes from You. Help us to accept the trials without complaint and to give thanks and praise for the blessings. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth." Revelation 16:1

With the completion of the prelude to the coming bowl judgments revealed in Chapter 15, this chapter now begins with the details of that scene starting to be filled in. In this, John opens the words of Chapter 16 with, "Then I heard a loud voice."

This is the often-repeated phrase going back to verse 1:10 and having been used quite a few times since then. The heralding of a new part of a scene, or the introduction of a new event, is preceded by a loud voice. This one is said to be "from the temple."

It was just said in the previous verse that "no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed." Therefore, this is the voice of the Lord Jesus Himself (the God/Man) calling out and "saying to the seven angels, 'Go.'"

As noted, the seven angels might be (and probably are) "the seven Spirits who are before His throne" of Revelation 1:4. They are His "angels," meaning "messengers," of destruction upon the world that has rejected Him. They are told to "Go." It indicates the set time has come, and the purposes of God will now be met in their going forth. Their purpose is to "pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

Rather than "on," the preposition signifies "into." The measure of iniquity of man has reached its fullness, and the time for God to judge the earth has come. It is the same thought as that which occurred in Genesis at the coming of the flood of Noah. It is what occurred when Egypt was judged. It is the same for the Amorites in Canaan when they were exterminated by Israel. There is a point where God's wrath is poured out on those who have rejected Him. This is, again like at the time of Noah, which is to be on a global scale.

<u>Life application:</u> The direction is given and there will be no holding back on what is coming. The trumpet judgments were limited in their size and scope, and served as warnings concerning what would come if the world wouldn't turn to God. And, of course, it didn't. Therefore, the bowl judgments are on their way. They will pour out plagues in full strength, and no one on earth will be spared from what is coming.

We tend to think that if we just store up enough food, money, or other things, then we will be secure from troubles that other people will be caught in. In fact, the concept of

IRAs and other retirement funds is to provide security during the years of difficulty that lay at the end of every working life. But relying on these things is tenuous at best. A little hiccup in an economy can wipe away vast fortunes.

A set of worldwide calamities will take away every thought of security. People will live day to day and feel the effects of these judgments continuously. We think we can hide from God, but He is ever-present. When His judgment comes, it will be a terrifying thing.

For the Christian, we know that our security isn't in gold or silver, nor is it in the US dollar, a hedge fund, or an IRA. Our security is in the shed blood of Jesus Christ and in the power of His resurrection! And that is security we can bank on. Thank God for JESUS!

Lord, let us take a moment to thank You for the surety we have in You! Thank You for Your shed blood and the offer of peace that comes through it. Now we can rest in absolute surety that we will stand in Your presence without any fear of condemnation! Great are You, O Lord, and greatly to be praised! Hallelujah! Yes, praise the Lord! Amen.

So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Revelation 16:2

The previous verse instructed the seven angels to go and pour out their bowls. With that stated, it now reads, "So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth." As in verse 1, the preposition signifies "into" rather than "upon." There is a sequential order to the pouring out of the bowls, just as there has been a sequential order to the breaking of the seals and the sounding of the trumpets. As for this first bowl, it says, "and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men."

This does not match the first trumpet. There, the action was directed to the trees and the green grass. This is directed towards mankind, upon whom falls this sore. The Greek words used to describe it are the adjectives *kakos* (evil, rotted, poisoned) and *ponéros* (evil, pain-ridden, agonizing). The cognate nouns are both used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:8 –

> "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth."

In the rejection of that which is good, and in focusing on that which is filled with malice and wickedness, the world will receive a just punishment in like-kind upon themselves. In this judgment, there is a connection to the sixth plague that fell upon Egypt –

> "So the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moses scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh. **9** And it will become fine dust in all the land of Egypt, and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.' **10** Then they took ashes from the furnace and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses scattered *them* toward heaven. And *they* caused boils that break out in sores on man and beast. **11** And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians." Exodus 9:8-11

Though no specific disease is indicated, the connection to the boils of Egypt may be what will again afflict the people. Also, it may be that the sores coming upon the people are similar to those Job would have experienced –

> "So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head." Job 2:7

They may affect the entire body, and they will probably be abscessed and malignant. Deuteronomy 28:35 gives a description of such sores as well –

> "The Lord will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head."

Whatever it is, it will be something that will terribly afflict the people it lights upon, meaning those "who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image."

It is of note that the sores will come specifically upon those who have taken the mark of the beast. With modern technology bringing the world closer and closer to this inevitable moment in time, many new ways of solidifying power are coming about. There are vaccines that are being developed, and vaccine passports are being initiated so that only those who accept these things have certain privileges.

There are also injectable tracking devices such as RFID chips. These, and several other types of technologies, could certainly lead to one which will be decided upon for all people to receive. However, that very mark may be the means of bringing about these horrifying sores.

This doesn't seem far-fetched at all. Many of these technologies that are supposedly intended for good are already showing horrifying side effects. When the mark of the beast is decided upon, it may be that it will take a year or two for the effects to manifest themselves. By then, it will be too late, and the sores will come.

Life application: This will be a worldwide and ongoing series of calamities, and there will be no petitioning for God to lessen the suffering – the heavenly tabernacle is closed until the judgment is finished.

In today's world, people think it's fun to proclaim they are atheists. There are seminars set up for people to rage against God, and it is fashionable to write books and make movies about the liberated state of humanism. And, with more people following this path, the cooler it seems. But a time is coming (and remember, this is only the first plague) when giving allegiance to the beast will be a sorely (pun intended) regretted decision.

All of this could be averted by just calling out to God and acknowledging Him and receiving His offer of peace. Let us be wise and look to our Creator and His open hand of grace. Let us come to JESUS.

Heavenly Father, the pains we suffer and the trials we face almost always come directly from our own bad decisions. And a time is coming when the world will collectively face them. Why can't we just look at the creation and acknowledge that it isn't mere chance that we're here? Why can't we just give You the glory You're due? Forgive us and heal us. Amen.

Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead *man*; and every living creature in the sea died. Revelation 16:3

This second bowl judgment is not unlike the second trumpet judgment. Placed side by side, this becomes evident –

- Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead *man*; and every living creature in the sea died. (bowl)
- Then the second angel sounded: And *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. (trumpet)

Having noted that, John begins the words with, "Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea." The first bowl was poured out into (Greek: *eis*) the earth. Now, rather than the earth, the second bowl is poured out into (Greek: *eis*) the sea.

This bowl judgment closely corresponds to the first plague upon Egypt –

> "So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that *were* in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that *were* in the river were turned to blood. **21** The fish that *were* in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt." Exodus 7:20, 21

This correlation is seen in this verse as John continues by saying, "and it became blood as of a dead *man*." It is debated what the meaning of these words is. Does it mean "very bloody," as in someone who has been stomped on and mangled, or does it mean "dark and lifeless," as in the blood of a corpse which has no oxygen flowing to it and which has been corrupted?

Either way, the symbolism is probably of a great sea battle where countless people have slaughtered one another. Or, maybe more likely, some cataclysmic disaster – such as radiological, biological, nuclear, etc. – has occurred. If the latter, the sea dies and takes up a dead color demonstrating a lack of oxygen and vibrancy. Because of this, John next says, "and every living creature in the sea died."

One thought by some scholars is that this "sea" is the same symbolism used elsewhere to designate the "sea" of people in the world, not the literal sea of the ocean. This is certainly not what is being portrayed here. If "every living creature in the sea died," then it is not referring to people of the nations. The term is a general term, not a specific term like "every person in the sea." The general nature of the terminology demands a literal rendering of "sea."

The result of such a cataclysm, and the resulting decrease in oxygen, would be death as the life in the sea suffocates. This would cause an immense smell to arise, and from there, the sea life would wash up on shores leading to pestilence and disease.

The scope of this judgment is not stated. Is this speaking of the area of Israel alone? If so, it may be the Mediterranean Sea. It could extend to one of the greater seas in the world as well. However, it is unlikely that it would encompass the entire earth. Even the most severe disaster would hardly kill every living thing in all of the world's oceans. Being dogmatic at the scope of the event is currently pointless, but when it occurs, it will be known as the fulfillment of the prophecy.

<u>Life application:</u> In Leviticus 17:11, it says this – "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood

that makes atonement for one's life." The life is in the blood, but when this second bowl is poured out, it "became blood as of a dead man." In other words, there is death in the waters and not life; the opposite effect of what God originally intended for His creatures.

The terminology here allows that this is not real blood, but what would resemble the blood of a dead person. It would stink and have death-producing effects. God is using this horrifying form of judgment as a punishment upon the world. It will be an immensely effective tool because the waters of the oceans affect all the land they come in contact with.

Depending on the actual scope of the plague, the world will lose a large source of food, and it will only lead to greater disaster as the bowl judgments continue, all because people have decided to reject God's offer of peace through His Son. God has made the offer, and the entire focus of what occurs throughout redemptive history towards man – be it positive or negative – is the result of how we respond to that offer. Everything is centered on our Lord, JESUS.

Lord, when the great judgments of the end times come, the people of the world will certainly curse You and say that You are unfair in Your dealings. But for those of us who believe Your word as it is written, we know that Your judgment is right because You have let us know in advance what is coming. Great are You when You judge, O God. Amen.

Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Revelation 16:4

This closely corresponds to the effects of the sounding of the third trumpet –

- Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. (bowl)
- Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. (trumpet)

With that understood, John begins the verse with, "Then the third angel poured out his bowl." The sequence of bowls being poured out is given in order for us, but it does not mean that they do not overlap in time. We are simply being presented with the effects of the events in order to know what occurs with each one. The effect of this outpouring is "on the rivers and springs of water."

As with the previous two outpourings, the Greek reads *eis*, into, not *epi*, upon. The effect of the outpouring goes into the rivers and springs of water, mixing with them, "and they became blood."

The verb in the Greek is singular. Therefore, instead of saying, "they became," it should more precisely say, "it became," or "there came." Despite this, the words here convey the same thought as the previous outpouring. Without saying it this time, the result is probably the death of everything in them, but this is not explicitly stated.

Life application: At the sounding of the third trumpet, only a third of the rivers and the springs of water were affected. However, no such distinction is made here. Either these words here are speaking in general terms, or the plague is vaster in its scope.

No matter which, life can't survive without water, and so the people will be forced to drink what is available, even if it brings about agony and death. In the modern world, filtration is available, but not on a grand scale. Much of the earth will be forced to drink this water in its polluted state. And, depending on what has contaminated the waters, filtration may not be able to completely purify it.

The world is reaping the harvest it has sown and in a most personal way. Every mouth will loathe what it is offered, and yet it will be forced to accept it anyway. The mouths which should have given praise, honor, and glory to the Creator are now forced to drink of the corrupt creation that they worshiped. The irony is truly palpable in this plague, and it will certainly consume a great many people in the process.

Be sure to pray for the lost now, and also to take every chance to tell them the good news of the gospel. And more, be a living testimony to the goodness of God that says forgiveness is available for all who come to Him through faith in the precious Gift of JESUS.

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, "Where is your God?" Amen.

And I heard the angel of the waters saying:
"You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,
Because You have judged these things. Revelation 16:5

The previous verse saw the third angel pour out his bowl on the rivers and springs of waters, turning them to blood. With that done, it now records a doxology of praise to the Lord, saying, "And I heard the angel of the waters saying." This is the angel set over the waters, just as there were angels who were in charge of the winds in Revelation 7:1–

> "After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree."

Likewise, an angel was noted in verse 14:18 having "power over the fire."

What is probably the case is that this "angel" over the waters is another revelation of Christ Jesus. As the Creator, He is in charge of all aspects of His creation. In the first four verses of this chapter, four aspects of the created order have been noted – heaven (verse 1), earth (verse 2), the sea (verse 3), and the fountains of waters (verse 4). This angel then says, "You are righteous, O Lord."

It is a note that what has occurred in the judgment is appropriate. There is nothing unjust in the actions against the people, but rather the Lord is justified in taking action appropriate to the state of the people of the earth. The angel next says, "The One who is and who was and who is to be."

It is another confirmation of the deity of Christ. This concept, or one similar to it, is found so far in Revelation 1:4, 1:8, 4:8, & 11:17. Each directly or indirectly refers to Christ Jesus. Here, it refers to Him as "Lord God Almighty" in verse 16:7. It is the deity of Jesus Christ that is on prominent display throughout the book.

The nature of God in Christ is unchanging. The standard of His judgments does not change, but they come in response to the sin of man. Everything He judges will be perfectly judged, and the resulting punishments will be in accord with that unchanging standard. This is the reason for, again, calling Him the One who is and who was and who is to come. Understanding that, the next clause continues with, "Because You have judged these things."

In accord with His standard, the judgment has been made, and the punishment has been meted out. That will be described in the next verse.

<u>Life application:</u> As referred to above, an interesting concept has slowly developed through the chapters of Revelation. We have seen the angels with power over the winds

in Revelation 7. Then we saw the angel who had power over fire. This verse now shows us the angel of the waters.

Unlike other religions which ascribe a deity to the elements, the Bible proclaims that God is sovereign over His creation. Either He has directly controlled them (if these angels are revelations of Christ), or He has designated a created angel with authority over each of these things. Either way, the control of the elements is subservient to His direction for those things.

In this verse, the angel of the waters (be it Christ directly or an angel appointed under His authority) acknowledges this. Instead of questioning why the waters under His care are harmed, the angel states that God is righteous in His judgment. He also clearly identifies and calls into remembrance that God is sovereign over time itself. He is "the One who is and who was and who is to be."

Because of this, His transcendence over time means that He is outside of time and therefore before the creation. Thus, it is His to direct. And in the time of tribulation, that direction includes the judgment of the people of the world through the elements.

In the end, whether through earthquake, famine, flood, lightning, or any other natural disaster, we have no right to question God when disaster occurs in such ways. He created, and the creation is His to direct for His purposes. Let us understand this and know that God is just when He judges. Let us be grateful that our judgment for sin has been taken out on another at the cross of Calvary. We can have release from condemnation if we simply call out in faith for the saving grace of God that is found in JESUS.

Lord, the elements can scare us because we are powerless to do anything about them, but we also know that they are under Your control. Should we be afflicted by natural disaster, it didn't happen apart from Your knowledge. Help us to remember this and to give You praise at all times, even when we don't fully understand what has occurred or why. Amen.

For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink.
For it is their just due." Revelation 16:6

This verse continues the doxology of praise to the Lord based on the pouring out of the bowl on the rivers and springs of water. The last clause of the previous verse said,

“Because You have judged these things.” That judgment is now described, beginning with, “For they have shed the blood of the saints and prophets.”

This is speaking of the nations and people of the world. They have taken the mark of the beast, they have allied themselves against the Lord, and they have martyred those who have refused the mark. They also killed the two witnesses (the prophets), and any others who spoke forth the word of the Lord concerning turning from their sins and to holiness in Christ.

The term “prophet” does not necessarily mean one who is commissioned by the Lord to prophesy under inspiration. It can also mean in the wider sense of the word as simply speaking forth what is recorded in the word of God, as a preacher or teacher of the word might do.

Because of this, the doxology continues with, “And You have given them blood to drink.” This is referring to the judgment of the pouring out of the third bowl and the waters turning to blood. This does not necessarily mean the waters have become blood, but blood stands representative of life and/or death. When it is said that blood is shed, such as in a sacrificial animal or when referring to Christ, it means that the life is shed and thus death is the result. Therefore, giving “them blood to drink” may simply signify that the waters they drink result in death. With that understood, the verse finishes with, “For it is their just due.”

The words translated as “their just due” are more of a paraphrase. It is an adjective, not a noun. The KJV says, “for they are worthy.” This is closer to the intent, but “worthy” normally carries a positive connotation. A better translation would be, “For they are deserving.” They have heaped up the measure of their sins and they are deserving of death. This is the idea being conveyed.

<u>Life application:</u> Blood for blood – the people of the world are receiving their just due for their violent and ungodly actions, having shed the blood of the Lord’s people.

Revelation is speaking of the time of tribulation at the end of the age, so this verse is surely referring first to those who have died during the church age and also leading into the tribulation period. But more specifically, it is referring to the wholesale slaughter of God’s people during the tribulation.

A saint is anyone who has called on Jesus Christ as Lord. This is evidenced time and again in the epistles and obviously bears little resemblance to those designated “saints” by the Roman Catholic Church.

A saint is a saint based on a relationship with Christ, not a congregation. The saints of the church age have often been faithful even unto death, starting with the first recorded martyr in the New Testament – Stephen in Acts 7. Throughout the bloody ages, God has not forgotten any of them or their deeds. The "prophets" are those who prophesy on behalf of the Lord. There are two types of prophecy – foretelling and forth-telling.

Foretelling is what the prophets of old and the apostles of the New Testament did. They spoke the word of God to the people of God. Foretelling ended at the time the book of Revelation was complete, but prophets still forth-tell to this day. Faithful men of God – pastors and preachers who speak the word of God to the world – are today's prophets, speaking the sealed words found in the Holy Bible. They have, along with the other saints, been martyred for their faithfulness. But like all of God's faithful martyrs since the creation of the world, He has remembered them and their shed blood.

For their slaughtering of these people, the world is now given blood to drink, "for it is their just due." God has seen, God has judged, God has sentenced, and God now executes the sentence - blood for blood.

For those in Christ who have died, it is a temporary thing. There is the hope of an eternity of days ahead, walking in the glory of God and reveling in what He has done through His Son. He is great. He is glorious. He is JESUS!

Lord, You have watched and seen what has been done to Your faithful over the centuries. A time is coming when all wrongs will be made right, and all penalties will be executed with speed and finality. We can be assured that our faithful witness for You will not go unnoticed, and we thank You for Your watchful eye upon our souls. Amen.

And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous *are* Your judgments." Revelation 16:7

It should be noted that some manuscripts leave out the words "another from." Instead, it reads, "And I heard the altar saying." In other words, the altar is personified, representing those who were martyred as were noted in Revelation 6–

> "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. **10** And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" **11** Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little

while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were,* was completed." Revelation 6:9-11

If the words "another from" are original, it could be representing the collective voice of the people (which would make less sense because they all speak in Revelation 6), or it could be another revelation of Christ, being the Representative of the altar calling out on their behalf. Whichever is correct, the voice is singular, and it calls out, "Even so, Lord God Almighty."

It has been seen elsewhere already that the term *pantokratór*, or "Almighty," is referring to Jesus. It generally must be inferred from the surrounding context, but this is certain. As such, it does not negate the voice being that of Christ.

As has been seen elsewhere, various aspects of Christ are seen to interact with one another in order for us to understand His various roles. This is not unique to the New Testament, but is seen in the Old as well, such as in Psalm 110:1 where the Lord (Yehovah) is noted as speaking to Himself in this manner. Whoever the voice issues from, it is directed to the all-powerful Lord, and it continues by calling out, "true and righteous *are* Your judgments."

This follows in thought from the previous doxology called out by the martyrs seen in Revelation 15 –

"Great and marvelous *are* Your works,
Lord God Almighty!
Just and true *are* Your ways,
O King of the saints!
4 Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For *You* alone *are* holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested." Revelation 15:3, 4

In verse 15:3, the same word is used as here, but there it is inconsistently translated as "<u>just</u>." For consistency, it should have said, "<u>Righteous</u> and true *are* your ways." In this, the connection is made all the more obvious. The call from the altar is that the Lord is righteous and true in all His ways, including in His judgments. This is the repeated cry now in verse 16:7. He has given the offenders their just due by giving them blood to drink because they had shed the blood of the saints and prophets.

Life application: The words here call out the righteous nature of the judgments of God. One tired excuse which is often given for not accepting the Bible is that God is mean. Questions are directed against Him based on that premise – "How could He allow death in the world? What kind of God allows bad things to happen? The God of the Bible is bad because He ordered Israel to kill all of the people in the land of Canaan." On and on it goes. People find fault with God instead of taking the time to understand who He is.

God is the Creator of time, space, and matter, and therefore He is prior to these things; He is eternal and unchanging. God doesn't love one person more than another; God is love. God doesn't hate one group of people more than another; God is just. God doesn't overlook sin; God is righteous. These qualities don't increase or decrease – they simply are.

Paul carefully explains these things in the book of Romans, but a good place to grasp them is found in Romans 3. God is holy and sin is unholy. It must be judged; God cannot compromise His own nature. It is a nature that demands the judgment of sin.

So why do some get to heaven and others go to hell? All sin receives its judgment. For some, it is in the substitutionary punishment found in the cross of Jesus, and heaven is the result. However, if judgment isn't executed in Jesus' cross, then it must be executed in the individual. There is no other way to satisfy a finite sin against the infinite God. Only Jesus Christ, who is fully Man and fully God, can bridge the gap between the two. When sin is judged in the individual apart from Jesus, the only possible result is hell.

If one can truly grasp this, then the judgments of God are understood to be righteous. God is both just and the Justifier of those who call on Jesus. There is only impartiality – only a completely fair execution of the sentence on sin – death. The calamity that has happened in this temporary, earthly world is not God's fault, it is ours. He gracefully offers us a choice (faith in Jesus) in order to correct our sin nature. His judgments within the world are perfectly fair because it is we who have set ourselves at enmity with Him.

The good news for the Christian is that because Jesus is sinless, death couldn't hold Him and this, therefore, translates to the faithful believer as well – eternal life in the presence of God, unstained by sin because of the precious blood of Christ. What a Gift! He is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. He is JESUS!

O Heavenly Father, how wondrous are Your ways! How glorious is Your plan! How righteous are Your judgments! We can only shout with a loud and resounding voice of praise at the greatness of what You did for us in the giving of Your own Son. May we never fail to proclaim the greatness of the Lord! Hallelujah and Amen.

Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. Revelation 16:8

John's vision now turns to the plague of the fourth bowl, beginning with, "Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl." It is the pouring out of God's wrath upon the world that has rejected Him. In the pouring out, it says, "on the sun."

The first three, in order, were poured out on the earth, the seas, and then the rivers and springs of water. Each of these was a directed action on the planet in which we live. This one is on the sun, an extraterrestrial body. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that the sun is affected, although it could be so – such as in increased sunspots, increased electromagnetic radiation, or some other solar occurrence.

However, it could be that the effects of the sun are simply more pronounced here on earth; maybe the ozone layer has been adversely affected. Whatever occurs, the result will be catastrophic, and it will be agonizing for those who failed to give God the glory He is due. In this judgment upon the sun, John then says, "and power was given to him."

The word "power" is inserted. A more correct reading is, "and there was given to him." In other words, the power, ability, or authority to take action according to the pouring out of the bowl on the sun belongs to him. It speaks of the result of the pouring out, which is "to scorch men with fire."

Again, the Greek is more precise, saying, "in fire." Fire is the condition or state in which the scorching takes place. Whether the sun is directly affected (as noted above), or whether it is the earth that is affected because of the lack of its normal protection (ozone or etc.), the heat will be so intense on earth that fires will become more pronounced due to the extremely dry conditions that permeate the land.

If this is what is being prophesied, then it means that not only will the earth be physically affected by the fire, but many secondary issues will arise as well. Without protection from the sun and cooling from the rains, crops will fail, lakes will dry up, and so on.

One of the terrible afflictions that people face on earth is that of famine. When it comes, everything dries up and dies. The effects are then multiplied because there is no place to hide from the heat. When one is left in the heat for too long, only misery is to be expected. Eventually, if no relief comes, death is the result. Such is the state that will come to pass when the fourth bowl is poured out.

Life application: Death from heat and no water (as is already the case from the third bowl) is exceptionally bitter. The book of Lamentations gives a vivid description of this –

> "The tongue of the infant clings
> To the roof of its mouth for thirst;
> The young children ask for bread,
> *But* no one breaks *it* for them.
> **5** Those who ate delicacies
> Are desolate in the streets;
> Those who were brought up in scarlet
> Embrace ash heaps.
> **6** The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people
> Is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom,
> Which was overthrown in a moment,
> With no hand to help her!
> **7** Her Nazirites were brighter than snow
> And whiter than milk;
> They were more ruddy in body than rubies,
> *Like* sapphire in their appearance.
> **8** *Now* their appearance is blacker than soot;
> They go unrecognized in the streets;
> Their skin clings to their bones,
> It has become as dry as wood.
> **9** *Those* slain by the sword are better off
> Than *those* who die of hunger;
> For these pine away,
> Stricken *for lack* of the fruits of the field." Lamentations 4:4-9

Ancient Israel was punished for disobedience and the suffering was immense. Throughout the ages, such suffering has been recorded time and again. The difference with the Tribulation Period though is that the calamity will be global in nature. How much better to call out to God now through His offer of peace, instead of having to face the suffering which lies ahead. God has lovingly and graciously made this offer through the giving of His Son. He is our hope, our place of rest, and our hiding place from what lies ahead. He is JESUS!

Heavenly Father, Your word tells us that it is Your desire that none perish. However, You give us the freedom to choose. In the end, the misery of the coming Tribulation is self-inflicted, and the people will pay for their decision to reject Your gracious offer. Help us, Lord, to be faithful witnesses of Your gospel now before that time comes. Amen.

And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.
Revelation 16:9

In the previous verse, the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun. In this, power was given to him to scorch men with fire. In response to that, it now says, "And men were scorched with great heat."

As noted in the previous verse, this could be either an effect coming from the sun, or the sun could remain unchanged, but the state of the earth, such as the ozone layer being depleted, results in the sun's heat being magnified. Either way, it is the sun that is the source of the heat that scorches man. The effects of this would go beyond man though. With such radiant heat, there would be the same effect on the animals and on the crops. The earth is going to go into a terrible tailspin of agony, pain, and deprivation. Despite this, it next says, "and they blasphemed the name of God."

This is the opposite of what occurred in verse 11:13. There it said –

> "In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven."

The people gave glory to God before. Now, however, there is no such thought. Instead, they blaspheme His name. The innate knowledge of God referred to by Paul in Romans 1:21 is completely ignored, exactly as Paul said there as well. It reflects the state of depravity that man will turn to. Instead of calling out to Him for healing, they instead curse Him for His righteous judgments. They fail to acknowledge that it is He "who has power over these plagues."

As God is the Creator and Sustainer of creation, it is without a doubt that He has complete control over His creation. Nothing occurs apart from His power and knowledge, and all things occur in accord with His will. This includes the plagues of the end times. Man possesses this knowledge, but he willfully suppresses it in his unrighteousness. In this, John finishes the verse with, "and they did not repent and give Him glory."

The judgments of God are just, and those who receive them are deserving of what occurs. God looks for the heart that is humble and will turn to him. This is seen throughout the Old Testament where kings would turn and repent, and the Lord would send tender mercies upon the people. But no such mercy is coming for those who face

this fourth bowl judgment. Their hearts only grow harder, and the judgments upon them will continue to come because they fail to repent and give God the glory that He is due.

Life application: In today's pre-Tribulation world, there has been a debate known as "climate change." Before that, it was called "global warming." Before that, was the scare of "acid rain." Of course, in the 1970's it was the scare of "global cooling." Each previous scenario has been proven false, and so the terminology was slyly and subtly changed to "climate change" which, in fact, means nothing at all. And yet it means anything that the proponent so chooses.

These doomsayers don't want to correct their belief when it is found to be wrong, even though they know what they are proposing isn't true. What they want is two-fold –

1) To shut God out and hint His word isn't true. When He said after the flood of Noah that there will never be another worldwide flood, He meant it. But scare tactics of climatology want to refute this and thus demonstrate that the God of the Bible isn't really in control of His creation.
2) Control over the masses. If God cannot be trusted, then humans must take the initiative in "saving the world from itself."

In order to do this, a select few that are more "enlightened" than the rest will come up with the solutions for the general population. But such solutions come at the high price of giving up personal freedom. The world is already drinking the Kool-Aid of "climate change," and it is willingly being steered into such bondage. Not surprisingly, at the head of this deception is the pope who sits in the Vatican, acting as an authority on climate matters when he should be reading his Bible.

What he, and those world leaders associated with him, do not understand is that the proposed solutions will certainly lead to the plagues which they are supposedly fixing. God will not be mocked, and the rejection of Him and His word of truth will wind up resulting in the punishments that He has already stated will come. Is global warming a reality? The answer is no and yes.

In today's world, no. It is a lie and the utterance of liars. But in the tribulation to come, it is a certainty. Global warming will scorch the world with heat. This is not because the pope and the others with him in this agenda are right, but because in man's actions toward God we "did not repent and give Him glory."

Instead, when the time of heat and misery comes, they will only further blaspheme His name. They will know He has control over the plagues, but they will continue to try to fix things apart from Him. Their actions will merely compound the misery and bring the world to a terrifying state of agony.

How just and right are the judgments of God that are coming upon the whole world! They have turned from Him to false gods of power, control, and profit. They have rejected the only Source of light, life, and peace with Him. They have rejected JESUS.

One thing we know, O God, is that Your word is true. When You speak, it comes with the complete assurance that what You say will come to pass. When You warn, it is for our own good, and when You direct, it is to keep us from harm. Thank You for Your word of truth which is certain to keep us on the right path. Amen.

Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain.
Revelation 16:10

With the fourth bowl complete, the scene immediately moves to the pouring out of the next one, and so John says, “Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast.”

The pouring out has gone from the earth to the sea to the rivers and springs of water. It now goes to “the throne of the beast.” Where is the throne of the beast? Revelation can get confusing and biblical references, depending on one’s world view, will be chosen to fit the scenario. Chapter 17 identifies a great harlot who sits on “seven mountains.” The Greek word can mean both “mountains” and “hills.”

Rome for thousands of years has been known as the city on seven hills and so this is a likely choice. Jerusalem doesn’t sit on seven hills, even though people have tried to fudge that into belief over the years. If the hills are literal, then the beast’s throne is Rome. However, elsewhere in the Bible, mountains are symbolic of governmental authority. Therefore, the “mountains” could be seven governments on which the harlot sits.

Based on an analysis of Daniel chapter 9, it does seem more likely that this is speaking of Rome and therefore the mountains are literal. Either way, the fifth angel’s bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast. When he does, the beast’s “kingdom became full of darkness.”

In the Bible, darkness is as much of a judgment as any of the other torments experienced. One might think that relief from the sun would be found, but the heat of the sun hasn't gone away. Rather it is still there, but the darkness won't even allow men to locate refuge. The darkness during the plague of Egypt was so intense that it could actually be felt –

> "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness *which* may even be felt.' **22** So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. **23** They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." Exodus 10:21-23

Darkness is recorded for judgment elsewhere in the OT prophets such as Isaiah, Joel, and Nahum. It can represent calamity, chaos, confusion, and distress. Concerning judgment of sin, darkness came upon all the land at the time of Jesus' crucifixion–

> "Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. **46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'"
>
> -Matthew 27:45-46

The difference between the darkness at that time and the time of the tribulation is marked though. When Jesus died, sin was judged in Christ as a substitution for others' sins. But during the tribulation, the judgment of darkness is poured out directly on the people for their own sins. It will be horrific and exacting. It will be so agonizing that "they gnawed their tongues because of the pain."

The word translated as "gnawed" is found nowhere else. The expression itself is also unique. However, it is completely understandable. The grief of the affliction is so great that the people will chew on their tongues, looking for relief from the anguish they experience. This anguish, as noted above, certainly includes the heat of the sun. The darkness has not brought relief from that. Rather, the people are as if in an oven. They are being baked alive in the darkness along with other afflictions as well. The surprising lack of change in their attitudes will be revealed in the next verse.

<u>Life application:</u> The water has been affected, the sun's heat is radiating down on the people, and the people are now doused in darkness as well. The gnawing of their tongues gives the sense of great distress from thirst. The terror of such a plight is actually highlighted at the cross of Christ.

Despite all of the afflictions He suffered, the one that is brought into the narrative by His own words is that of thirst –

> "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!' **29** Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put *it* on hyssop, and put *it* to His mouth. **30** So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." John 19:28-30

In the end, all men are destined to die. During our lives, there is a spiritual thirst that exists. Most are not even aware of it. And yet, it is the greatest thirst of all. Without having it quenched, man will die apart from God and his thirst will continue on for all eternity. But if it is quenched, it will produce a fountain that will spring up for all eternity.

The choice is ours, and we must make it while we have the chance. Jesus spoke of it –

> "Jesus answered and said to her, 'Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.'" John 4:13, 14

He refers to this elsewhere as well. What we as humans need is to be revivified by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our souls. When this happens, we receive the water that will last forever. The way to receive this is to receive what God has offered in the giving of His Christ. Let us be wise and let us receive it today. The offer is made; the offer is JESUS!

Oh God, the terrifying nature of the plagues of Revelation reveals our need to get the word out to others. The time is coming, and the world needs to be ready. Help us to be effective communicators of the gospel of salvation which will keep others from going through the terrible miseries that lie ahead for the unrepentant world. May we be faithful to this calling. Amen.

They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds. Revelation 16:11

The fifth bowl has been poured out, resulting in darkness in the kingdom of the beast. Along with that, we saw that "they gnawed their tongues because of the pain." Normally, when tragedy occurs, the instinct is to cry out, "Oh God!" as a petition for

relief. This happens to saint and sinner alike. Even avowed atheists will say this. The deepest understanding instilled in the human psyche is that there is a God and that He is merciful when petitioned.

However, the Bible also refers to the searing of the conscience in people. This comes out in varying degrees, but there is a point where the conscience is so seared that even the most fundamental part of who we are is obliterated. The connection to God is so damaged that this deep-seated knowledge that He may relent from His wrath is gone. This is seen to be the case now in the pouring out of the fifth bowl. Instead of crying out to God for relief and/or giving Him glory (see Revelation 11:13), it now says, "They blasphemed the God of heaven."

This is similar to what was just said in verse 16:9 –

> "And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory."

The title, God of heaven, however, intensifies the crime. In verse 16:9, it acknowledged that God has power over these plagues, but in the minds of the people it could be a lesser "god." However, here that idea is extinguished. There is the understanding that One God resides in heaven and that He is the force behind the events. Instead of giving Him glory, they blaspheme Him. It is an astonishing thought to consider.

These people are aware of God's existence, they are receiving His judgments, and yet they are so depraved in their thinking that instead of acknowledging His right to judge them and calling out for mercy, they only provoke Him further "because of their pains and their sores."

If a person were to place his hand on a hot stove, the reaction would be to withdraw it quickly and not venture to do so again. In connection with that, they may shout out, "Stupid, stupid, stupid. I can't believe I did that." The people here respond in exactly the opposite manner. They have done wrong; they have been plagued because of their wrongdoing; and yet they return to their same depraved thinking. Peter speaks of the mental state of such people –

> "But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, **13** *and* will receive the wages of unrighteousness, *as* those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime." 2 Peter 2:12, 13

The Source of the pains and sores is attacked as if the depraved people are begging for more. And just to make sure that they have completely departed from any chance of His mercy, the verse finishes with, “and did not repent of their deeds.”

The conduct that brought them the agonies in the first place is not rejected. Instead, they continue down the same brutal path to perdition.

Life application: In 16:9, during the fourth bowl judgment, the sun scorched the people with great heat. At that time, the people are said to have “blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues.” Now, when the kingdom became “full of darkness,” the people have again “blasphemed the God of heaven.”

Whether in light or darkness, the heart of these people remains hard and defiant against God. The very fact that they blaspheme His name indicates an acknowledgment that He exists. No one blasphemes Godzilla because, despite being a scary movie monster, we all know he is not real. The agony and pain the people feel is returned to God in angry comments about Him and vulgar language toward Him.

What a vast difference from righteous Job who suffered in a similar fashion and yet made the acknowledgment that God is still deserving of praise –

> “And he said:
> ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
> And naked shall I return there.
> The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;
> Blessed be the name of the LORD.’
> **22** In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.” Job 1:21

After His beautiful and heartfelt utterance, the Bible records the appropriateness of Job’s words and actions by acknowledging that he did not charge God with wrong. The pattern has been given to us for holy living and right thought in the presence of God. It is laid out in the pages of the Bible, and it is available to all people. And yet, because of the deception of the antichrist and the blinding of the people’s eyes to the truth of God, they have rejected His word and thus God Himself.

Now only pain and suffering, with added condemnation for an ungodly response, is forthcoming. It should be noted that these verses are given in the aorist tense, and yet they are future to us even now. The entire book of Revelation is a testimony to the transcendence of God over what has been created, even into the future, and into the responses of each and every person who has lived or ever will live.

This in no way contradicts free will in man though. Just because God knows the choices we will make, it doesn't mean that our responsibility is negated. Rather, it shows the just nature of God when He judges. It is man's responsibility to act. And the main action that man can take to be reconciled to God is to call out to Him as He has decided is right. He has given the way, and He has made the path available. He has done everything for restoration to come about. He has given us JESUS.

Lord, one of the most common sights in the world is to see people blame You when disaster strikes – "How could God let this happen?" But it is our response to Your actions that demonstrate faith or faithlessness. Help us to be like Job where, even in affliction, we respond to You with words that will please You and bring You the honor You are due. Amen.

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.
Revelation 16:12

With the events of the fifth bowl complete, John now begins that of the sixth, saying, "Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates."

This follows in thought after the sixth trumpet –

> "Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, **14** saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.'"
>
> -Revelation 9:13, 14

The Euphrates lies within modern-day Iraq, and it is an area that is noted throughout biblical history. This will be no less true in the end times. When the angel pours out the bowl, John says of it, "and its water was dried up."

No indication of how this happens is given. The Euphrates was diverted by Cyrus when he attacked and overcame the Babylonian Empire. It could be something like this, or it could be that the heat of the previous bowl judgments has caused it to literally dry up. Others take this as figurative language. But the statement appears to be literal, however it happens. And there is a reason this is noted. It is "so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared."

Here, the Greek literally reads "from *the* rising *of the* sun," thus signifying "eastward." Who the "kings from the east" are is debatable. The events are future, and there is a lot

of land filled with many people groups in that direction. East of the Euphrates lies Persia (modern-day Iran), Afghanistan, Pakistan, (lots of other "stans" as well), India, China, and etc. Who exactly is referred to is thus speculative.

Interestingly, as this commentary is typed, China is working on its "Belt and Road Initiative." It is an effort to make a modern-day "silk road" from east to west and elsewhere around the world. It is a global development of infrastructure, investing in numerous countries in order to make this global trade effort possible. Thus, the movement of man and material would be easy enough and quick enough for "the kings of the east" to include nations all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Again, who these are is speculative at this time.

Life application: Everything that happens, no matter how seemingly disconnected or unrelated, is a part of God's plan. The Euphrates River is one of four riverheads that came from the main river flowing from the Garden of Eden. This is recorded in Genesis 2:4.

The Hebrew name of the Euphrates is Perath and means "fruitfulness." It has been the dividing line between what is considered living in God's presence and being separated from it since the very beginning. In Genesis 15:18, God told Abraham that this river would be the northernmost dividing line of the land he was being given. Therefore, anything outside of that would be considered a place of wandering and exile.

It is the land where Cain fled to before the flood. It is the land established by Nimrod after the flood. It is the spot where the nations attempted to cast off God's rule and build the tower of Babel, and it is the land that the patriarchs moved from before being called into the Promised Land (see Joshua 24:2). When Israel was disobedient, it was to Babylon that they were exiled. It is symbolic of enmity with God and false religion.

Now, this river is being dried up so that the kings of the east will have unrestrained access to enter into the land in preparation for the great battle to come. This hasn't happened yet in history since the writing of Revelation and therefore it must be future.

To attempt to align Revelation with the events of AD70 (the preterist view) makes no sense and such a view must dismiss these clearly stated verses. There is a battle coming which will involve many millions of people, and those in Asia will be a large part of the participating forces. The number is staggering, and the battle will be immense, but first, the waters must be dried up.

After the previous bowl where the sun has scorched the earth, this can be easily imagined. The world's water supply will be highly diminished and large rivers will become dry beds of cracked clay. The river of fruitfulness will become withered and unfruitful.

The world will head into a tailspin of war, blood, and death. The book is written, and the events will come to pass. Let us pay heed to the warning and be wise. Let us call out now for the saving grace bestowed upon man through God's giving of His Son. Let us call out now for JESUS.

Lord, even from the moment of creation, You have been in control of all things. The waters which flow tell us of Your wisdom. The sun which shines does so at Your command. All things are tied together and are working towards the fulfillment of Your plan. Thank You that this plan includes forgiveness through Jesus. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. Revelation 16:13

The previous verse saw the sixth bowl of God's wrath poured out on the Euphrates, drying it up and preparing a way for the kings of the east. Now, it says, "And I saw." It thus signifies a new part of the vision, separating what is to be said from what was just conveyed. Thus, what will be seen does not necessarily follow as a direct connection to the kings of the east, as if the kings of the east comprised those things next to be mentioned.

Rather, verses 13-16 are distinct in thought as a brief interlude between the sixth and seventh bowls. This is the same as what occurred with the interludes between the sixth and seventh seal, and the sixth and seventh trumpet. What John sees is, "three unclean spirits like frogs."

Frogs comprised the second plague upon Egypt as is recorded in Exodus 8:1-15. The Egyptian frog-headed god was Heqet, a goddess of fertility and related to the annual flooding of the Nile. Normally, the most noticeable characteristic of frogs one thinks of is its croaking – a constant, meaningless droning.

Their croaking can either be high or low-pitched. This would then represent the spirit of complaint or inciting complaint in others. The empty words of the leaders are directed toward emotion rather than reason; ungodliness rather than holiness; vain teachings rather than sound instruction.

This is the path of liberal, progressive, and socialist politicians and philosophers in the world today. They are having a marked effect on the populace, reducing people to the state of acting without reason. This will become the only standard during the tribulation.

Frogs also live in muddy and swampy areas. This could be indicative of people who live in sin and refuse to come out of it. The voices of these leaders will only support this lifestyle. Again, it is the liberal thinkers of the world who pull people away from God and towards humanism and dependency. What should involve effort on the part of the people is exchanged for dependency on the government.

Another aspect of frogs is that they can swell in size as they croak or for other reasons. This would be a representation of the boastful attitude of these demonic-inspired people in their defiance of God and their reliance on self and the worship of the devil.

The unclean and unholy words and actions of these demons will have a marked effect on the people of the world as mankind marches toward the great battle to come. With this understood, these unclean spirits are said to be, "*coming* out of the mouth."

The word "coming" is inserted and appears to be improperly added. The Greek reads, "out of the mouth." It is not that frogs are coming out of the mouth, but that the spirits, like frogs, are out of the mouth. Thus, the connection is probably to their sound, and not necessarily to their physical appearance.

As this is so, what the term "unclean spirits" is should be considered. Is this as is seen in the gospels, meaning demons that possess, or is this referring to the inspiring influence? As three entities will be identified in this verse, the answer is probably an inspiring influence. In other words, in 1 Timothy 4:1, it says –

> "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons."

It is not so much that these are demons that possess the entities (Satan is already their master) as that they are demons that influence. Their words are as the sound of frogs, droning incessantly and putting forth meaningless words of deceit.

Being "unclean" means that they are defiled, unholy, fleshly, earthly, and so on. They are opposed to what is good and proper. These unclean spirits are said to be "out of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet."

The dragon was described in Revelation 12. The beast is the beast out of the sea introduced in Revelation 13:1. The false prophet is the second beast, out of the earth introduced in Revelation 13:11. This second beast is identified as the false prophet in verse 19:20. To see the connection concerning this beast/false prophet, the two sets of verses should be placed side by side –

> "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. **14** And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. **15** He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed." Revelation 13:13, 14

> "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone." Revelation 19:20

Life application: The world is rushing headlong into a time when there will be no critical thinking left at all. The unceasing drone of politicians, who are specialists in nothing but getting elected because they can speak convincingly, is becoming the only voice that is allowed, and it is a voice that follows a party line.

To step outside of their line, or to think for oneself, is becoming less and less tolerated. With the inception of the overbearing influence of big tech, people's lives, actions, and even thought processes are easily monitored. To deviate from what is expected of submissive drones then leads to being ostracized and cast out from any chance of a normal functioning existence.

Above all, the high moral precepts of proper Christian living are being targeted. Soon, a time will arrive when even mentioning a walk in holiness will be so offensive that it will lead to excommunication or worse. Now is the time to fix your moral base and to determine to live by it. Read your Bible! Be prepared to defend your value choices based on it, and be willing to give up all if needed for what is good and right.

Though the rapture will happen before the coming tribulation, there is no guarantee that it will happen before the land you live in becomes completely intolerant towards proper Christian values. So set your standards now, be firm in your convictions, and keep your eyes firmly fixed on JESUS.

Lord Jesus, help us to think clearly about who You are and how we should act towards You. The leaders in our nation may have subtle and unholy agendas which are meant to turn us away from You and towards lives of ungodliness. Help us to discern these unclean spirits and to reject them for what they are. Keep us following the right path which will glorify You. Amen.

For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Revelation 16:14

These words of a brief interlude between the sixth and seventh bowl judgments began in the previous verse where three unclean spirits, like frogs, came out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. Now, those unclean spirits are further described by John, saying, "For they are spirits of demons."

As seen in the previous verse, these are probably influencing spirits that issue forth perverse doctrines and instruction. Of these demons, John says they are "performing signs."

The idea here is probably that these three great worldly entities speak forth things that champion their cause. For example, Hitler spoke forth things that he would do in the great power of the Third Reich. Not only did he speak them forth, but then he also followed through with what he spoke.

The word translated as "sign" is something that stands for something else. A miracle is its own thing. But a sign is a token of something, pointing to that thing. For example, in the Gospel of John, Jesus is said to perform signs. Each may be miraculous, such as turning the water into wine, but the point of the sign was not the thing itself, but to demonstrate that Christ is the Messiah. The sign was a pointer to this fact.

Thus, performing signs equates to these three entities saying they have a certain power, and then demonstrating that power, fulfilling the sign. This is what is happening here. Just as Hitler did these things, bringing his words to a state of actual occurrence, so these will also do. In this, the demonic influence is that which goes "out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world."

One can think of a tit for tat war of words: "We will take this land, and we will possess it." "No! You will never get that. We will destroy you if you try." Back and forth, each side maneuvers and postures to gain the advantage. Eventually, the posturing is done and the whole world is brought to the point prophesied in God's word. It all has led to

the time and place where the result is understood. These warring factions have been led by these demonic influences in order "to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

Of these words, Albert Barnes rightly states, "To the battle of that great day of God Almighty - Not the day of judgment, but the day which would determine the ascendancy of true religion in the world - the final conflict with those powers which had so long opposed the gospel."

This is not the day where God will judge, except in the sense that judgment is poured out. In the book of Joel, this battle is said to be in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, or "Yehovah Judges" –

> "For behold, in those days and at that time,
> When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem,
> **2** I will also gather all nations,
> And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;
> And I will enter into judgment with them there
> On account of My people, My heritage Israel,
> Whom they have scattered among the nations;
> They have also divided up My land." Joel 3:1, 2
>
> "Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;
> For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.
> **13** Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.
> Come, go down;
> For the winepress is full,
> The vats overflow—
> For their wickedness *is* great." Joel 3:12, 13

This is a battle where wickedness will be destroyed, but it is not the final judgment of those who are in the battle. That will occur when all people are brought forth before the throne of God. For now, it is a day where a great battle will occur and the Lord will defend His people, coming to rescue them from utter annihilation. The name of this location is given in verse 16:16, Armageddon. The final description of it is given in Chapter 19. Jesus Christ, God Almighty, will be victorious on that Day.

<u>Life application:</u> There is a battle coming which will make every other battle in human history seem pale in comparison. It is termed the "battle of that great day of God

Almighty." The term "God Almighty" comes from the Hebrew *El Shaddai*. This revelation of God demonstrates He is unchangeable, and yet He causes change in His creation.

In the books of Isaiah and Joel, He is the destructive power that is transcendent over all things. In Isaiah, we read this –

> "Wail, for the day of the LORD *is* at hand!
> It will come as destruction from the Almighty.
> **7** Therefore all hands will be limp,
> Every man's heart will melt,
> **8** And they will be afraid.
> Pangs and sorrows will take hold of *them;*
> They will be in pain as a woman in childbirth;
> They will be amazed at one another;
> Their faces *will be like* flames." Isaiah 13:6-8

In the day of the Lord, which is coming during the tribulation, the workings of God are as "destruction from Shaddai." There is both judicial and punitive power and performance in this terrifying name. Because of this, holiness is the hallmark of this revelation of Himself. In contrast to this is the spirits of the demons that perform signs.

These spirits resemble frogs, an unclean animal under the Law of Moses. In other words, they are anything but holy, and they are filled with deceptive signs. The world will be ripe for this judgment when it comes because they will have forsaken the truth and pursued the lie –

> "The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, **10** and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. **11** And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, **12** that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."
>
> -2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

The world will have rejected the "love of the truth" and their only possible means of salvation – Jesus Christ. Because of this, their eyes will lust after the deceptive signs which proceed from these unclean spirits. They will gather together in order to fight against God's purposes.

In the end, they will perish because of their rebellion. This will come about because they have rejected His word. It is that precious word that tells of God's saving power as is found in the giving of His Son, JESUS.

Lord God, we pray that You will work greatly now to change hearts from hatred to love. Change minds from deception to the truth. Change attitudes from unbridled emotion to reason and considered thought. Help us to see clearly now, before it's too late. May You be glorified through the changing of many people from darkness to light. Amen.

"Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." Revelation 16:15

The words of this verse continue the interlude between the sixth and seventh bowls. The previous verse noted that the armies of the world are being drawn "to the battle of the great day of God Almighty." Now, as a warning, John directly quotes the Lord Jesus in a parenthetical statement, saying, "Behold, I am coming as a thief."

The idea of the Lord's coming in this manner is seen numerous times, including Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:4; 2 Peter 3:10; and Revelation 3:3.

The words "as a thief" are given as a direct and unambiguous note that those in the tribulation must be prepared for what is coming and not be lax in their faithfulness. They have been warned and, in failing, there will be judgment.

Using the term "thief" means at a completely unexpected time, and in a completely unexpected manner. When the thief comes, it could be at 9pm or 3am. He might come in through the roof, or he might burrow in from underground. The idea is, "When you least expect it, be sure to expect it." With this in mind, Jesus next says, "Blessed is he who watches."

These words of this verse of the 16th chapter of Revelation match the 16th letter of the Hebrew Aleph-bet. The letter is *ayin*, represented by the pictograph of an eye. It has the meaning of "see," "watch," "know," and "shade." Here, Jesus says there is a blessing for those who watch, thus forming the letter/chapter pattern.

Concerning this idea of keeping watch in the end times, Jesus says it explicitly in both parable and open discourse to Israel in Matthew 24:42, Matthew 25:13; Mark 13:33-37; and Luke 12:37-39 and Luke 21:36, such as –

> "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."
>
> -Luke 21:36

In this watching by the tribulation saints, Jesus continues with his admonition, saying, "and keeps his garments."

The idea here is that of having one's garment always at hand. When one lays down to sleep, he may set his garments off to the side. If the thief comes, the garments may be stolen along with whatever else is at hand, leaving the person naked. Of this, Alfred Edersheim gives a real-life example of what this means –

"During the night the captain of the Temple made his rounds. On his approach the guards had to rise and salute him in a particular manner. Any guard found asleep when on duty was beaten, or his garments were set on fire. The confession of one of the Rabbins is on record that, on a certain occasion, his own maternal uncle had actually undergone the punishment of having his clothes set on fire by the captain of the Temple."

This soldier did not watch and keep his garments. He was unprepared for what would happen. Likewise, those of the tribulation needed to be ready – through life or death – for what would occur. As this warning of the Lord is set parenthetically between two verses that deal with the battle of Armageddon, it is certainly referring as much to death as anything else. The person in the end times is told to watch and keep his garments, "lest he walk naked."

The thought here is the same as for the church. When addressing those at Laodicea, Jesus said –

> "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."
>
> -Revelation 3:18

To more fully understand the symbolism, the commentary there can be referred to. But this speaks of being naked and exposed in one's sin. The only way to be covered from sin is by being covered in the righteousness of Christ. Without this, there is complete exposure of one's sin before God. In this, the words of the verse finish with, "and they see his shame."

The word translated as “shame” is found only here and in Romans 1:27. It signifies unseemliness, indecency, and so on. It is improper moral behavior. In these final words, Jesus uses the plural “they.” What this is referring to are those who are to bring in the righteous to the events after the battle. In other words, it is surely what Jesus is referring to in the parable of Matthew 22:1-14.

Jesus sends out his servants for the wedding feast, and only those who are properly clothed are invited in. As he says, however, at the end of the parable –

> “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. **12** So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. **13** Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” Mathew 22:11-13

The terminology and the symbolism here is directed to the tribulation period only. It is not a church-age warning. Thus, it is important to understand the distinction between what was addressed in the epistles, and also in the first three chapters of Revelation, from what is being referred to now.

Life application: The world is coming to the end of the bowl judgments and here, just before the 7th bowl is poured out, a stern warning is given about preparedness. There is a distinction being made between those who will see life and those who will be condemned, and it could occur at any moment. The distinction is Christ. There are only two states for man –

1) in Christ and covered by His righteousness, or
2) apart from Him which leaves one naked and exposed.

The Lord gives the warning for the tribulation world. But whether in the church age or during the tribulation, no one knows the hour he will die, or the hour that the Lord will return. Therefore, let us be found covered at all times. If we are, then we will be blessed.

Revelation 16:15 states the third of a series of seven blessings to an individual in the book of Revelation. The first two were in Revelation 1:3 and Revelation 14:13. Specific blessings to individuals are yet to be seen in verses 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14.

Take time to read those verses and to contemplate what they say. Some are directed to the church, some to those in the tribulation, and some to all. But all are based on a

relationship with God through what He has done in sending His Son to accomplish all things for us. Let us remember this and let us always be ready. He is coming again. He is JESUS!

Lord, pour out Your blessing of salvation and cover us in Your righteousness. We know that in us is nothing good. But because of You we can stand in the presence of God and not be condemned. Lead us in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake – to the glory of God and to the salvation of our souls. Amen.

And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.
Revelation 16:16

The thought now returns to the words of verses 13 & 14. Taken without the parenthetical insert, it would say –

> "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. **14** For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. ... **16** And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon."

The word "they" is referring to the unclean spirits. The word "them" is referring to "the kings of the earth and of the whole world." These unclean spirits of demons, through the performing of their signs, have brought the world to a point where they are drawn into a conflict that will encompass these kings of the earth (meaning the armies under their control). In this, they have brought "them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon."

The Hebrew name is transliterated into Greek as Harmagedón. Of John's words, two things seem certain. The first is that there is a comparable word in the Hebrew because he specifically states that it is so. Secondly, that place is identifiable. Almost all scholars identify this name as resulting from two separate words. The first is *har*, the Hebrew word for "mountain."

This does not necessarily mean a grand and exalted mountain, but it can refer to hill country, or a mountain in a figurative sense (such as in Exodus 15:17). The second word is from the Hebrew *Megiddon*, or Megiddo. This word comes from the location known in the Bible as Megiddo. That, in turn, comes from the verb *gadad*, to penetrate or cut,

or from the noun *gedud*, meaning a marauding band. Both find their origin in *gud*, to invade or attack.

As such, the NOBSE translates this as Place of Troops. Jones's Dictionary of the Old Testament Proper Names calls it Place of Multitudes (an apparent confirmation of this would be Joel 3:14). On the other hand, Abarim includes the beginning letter *mem* (the m at the beginning) to indicate an ongoing action. Thus, they make it an active word, translating it as Invading or Intruding.

No matter which choice is made, the location fits the idea of what lies ahead there. Abarim, however, finds that the word Armageddon may not refer to this location at all. They go into a long and airy analysis of why this word should be taken in a different way. To read that, this LINK will take you there.

Their analysis is weak in this regard, and it fails to take into consideration the biblical context, instead relying on ideas of their own fancy. The place known as Megiddo, in the Old Testament Scriptures, is referred to one time as *Meggidon* (in the Hebrew). That is found in Zechariah 12:11 –

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only *son,* and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. **11** In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo." Zechariah 12:10, 11

Because Hadad Rimmon is named, its definition should be explained. *Hadad* comes from a word signifying shouting or cheer. *Rimmon* signifies a pomegranate. That, in turn, comes from a word signifying "to be exalted." The idea then is that of harvesting ripe fruit. From there, Jones' Dictionary of Old Testament Proper Names translates this as Bursting of The Pomegranate. In this, one gets the same idea as the book of Revelation when it describes grapes thrown into a winepress.

There is a harvest of that which is abundantly ripe, and there will be a massive flow that issues from it. Zechariah's words appear to anticipate the same scenario as that of Revelation, and it does so in the same area and using the same form (in the Hebrew) of the name of Megiddo (Megiddon). It is a time of God's judgment day. In other words, it seems that this is what John is thinking of when he uses the term "called in Hebrew."

It is true that the term *har*, or mountain, is never used to describe Megiddo in the Old Testament. But to dismiss John's words is an argument from silence. He says the place in

Hebrew is (as transliterated into Greek) Harmagedón. Two identifiable words from the Hebrew Scriptures can be derived from this: *har* (a mountain) and the other one exactingly matching a known location (Hebrew *Mgiddon*).

If there is a plain of Megiddo, then there is something that identifies that plain, meaning Megiddo. If Megiddo is an elevated area in the plain, it can be assumed – without any damage to the context – that this mount is what identifies the plain. And this plain, or valley has already been described in Revelation –

> "And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." **19** So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God. **20** And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs."
>
> -Revelation 14:18-20

That winepress, meaning the battle described there, is then reexplained in Revelation 19:11-21. The description of the location of the battle (a plain suitable for warfare), having it described as "outside the city" (a clear reference to Jerusalem in 14:20), and the idea of the plain being identified by the prominent mount on that plain (Megiddo), is suitable to justify that this is, in fact, the correct location.

Joshua identifies it as a place of great mourning, meaning that many Jews died there. That mourning will be comparable to the knowledge that they realize they have missed the One they pierced as their Messiah for so long. The fact that the center of Scripture during this battle is focused on Israel, seems to make it clear that this is exactly what John is referring to.

<u>Life application:</u> The term "Armageddon" has become synonymous with any worldwide calamity – whether it is a great battle, destruction by an asteroid, or some other major event. However, there is only one "Armageddon" that fulfills the plan of God's workings in human history.

Megiddo is first noted in the Bible in Joshua 12:21. There it merely notes that this fortress was conquered, along with many other locations, by Joshua and the army of Israel during the conquest of Canaan. In Judges 1:27, it is noted that the people of Megiddo weren't driven out despite being conquered, and thus they continued to dwell in the land.

Great battles are noted as having been fought there in the area during biblical times (2 Chronicles 35:22), and even into modern history the area has seen conflict. The valley by the mountain is large and spacious, and immense armies can join in battle there. Today if one goes to Israel, a person can stand on top of the mountain – where ancient ruins can still be explored – and they can look over the valley which peacefully lies below. It is filled with agriculture and is a delight to the eyes. A fun short video on some of the things to see at this mount can be found at this LINK.

Looking over the beautiful expanse, it is hard to imagine the battles of the past. It is also hard to picture that the final great battle before Jesus returns will be held in this exact location. But this is the spot God has said it will occur, thus fulfilling not only this passage in Revelation, but numerous Old Testament passages as well. The word of God is sure, and it is sealed.

The day is coming, and it will come about exactly as stated. Until then, the world continues to make movies and write stories about this legendary name, not really realizing its true significance because they have failed to check the source of the use of the name, meaning Scripture. As they have ignored Scripture, they are also ignoring the One whom Scripture highlights. Without knowing Him, there will only be sadness, destruction, and condemnation. How terrible for the world that they will miss God's offer of peace. They will have missed JESUS.

Lord, time is marching on and we are ever closer to the coming Day when the world will meet in the great valley of Armageddon. Until then, help each of us to hold fast to Your word and to tell others about what is coming so that they will be prepared for the rapture and escape the calamitous events which have been prophesied in Your word. Amen.

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Revelation 16:17

With the interlude referring to the great battle of Armageddon complete, John now returns to the seventh and final bowl judgment, saying, "Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air."

What results from this pouring into the air is not actually stated, and it can only be guessed at what the result is. Some see it as the domain where the devil is. That would then be a reference to Ephesians 2 where he is called the prince of the power of the air. Others see it as supernatural events that appear to come from the air, such as tempests and storms and the like. Indeed, Zechariah 14 says the following –

"And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem:
Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet,
Their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets,
And their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths.
13 It shall come to pass in that day
That a great panic from the LORD will be among them.
Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbor,
And raise his hand against his neighbor's hand;
14 Judah also will fight at Jerusalem.
And the wealth of all the surrounding nations
Shall be gathered together:
Gold, silver, and apparel in great abundance.
15 Such also shall be the plague
On the horse *and* the mule,
On the camel and the donkey,
And on all the cattle that will be in those camps.
So *shall* this plague *be.*" Zechariah 14:12-15

This plague of being dissolved there is probably linked to a modern neutron bomb or the like. Something ignites the atmosphere, and the plague comes from that. However, it is what precedes this plague that is recorded in Zechariah 14 that is also recorded in Revelation 19 –

3"Then the LORD will go forth
And fight against those nations,
As He fights in the day of battle.
4 And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,
From east to west,
Making a very large valley;
Half of the mountain shall move toward the north
And half of it toward the south." Zechariah 14:3, 4

11Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. **12** His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. **13** He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. **14** And the armies

in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. **15** Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. **16** And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written:

KING OF KINGS AND
LORD OF LORDS.

-Revelation 19:11-16

Both end times passages refer to the return of the Lord to fight the battle for His people. Other similarities will be noted in the coming verses as well. The pouring out of the bowl into the air may simply be a way of saying that Christ, who is coming from heaven, will appear in order to bring final judgment upon the unrepentant people of the world. In this, there is a note of finality. As such, John continues with, "and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'"

There are various minor differences in these words. Some manuscripts leave out the words "of heaven." One says "God" instead of "throne." Either way, the intent is clear enough. A voice is issuing forth, and its proclamation is that of finality. It is not that everything has come to pass yet, but that everything that is necessary for the final accomplishment of the redemptive plan has been fulfilled. With the pouring out of the bowl, nothing further needs to occur for everything to come about.

Life application: The words "it is done," or more literally, "it has come to pass," are not to be confused with Jesus' final words on the cross. An entirely different word is used for each pronouncement in the Greek. In the case here, it is signifying the completion of the outpouring of the wrath of God, not an accomplishment of fulfilling the law and atonement on behalf of God's people – both of which were completed by Jesus on the cross.

This verse is also not the finality of the bowl judgment, only an indication that the time of the judgment has come. The next few verses will contain a limited description of the judgment which results from the outpouring of the bowl. Because of this, it is good to look back and remember now what was stated before the outpouring of the first bowl in verse 1, "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth'" (Revelation 16:1).

There has been no word from the throne since that time, but now that the seventh bowl is poured out, the Lord again speaks. There was, however, the brief interlude that was recorded after the sixth bowl in verse 15, saying, "Behold, I am coming as a thief.

Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

The Lord has given the warning that these great judgments are coming and that they will be executed with His authority. Therefore, He asks all to be ready for His coming so that these calamitous events can be avoided. When they come, the world will have no excuse for having rejected His offer of pardon. Now is the time of God's favor; today is the day of salvation. God has extended His glorious offer. He has given us JESUS.

Heavenly Father, You have given us everything we need to know in order to be saved and to be kept from the hour of trial which is coming upon the world. You have also told us in advance what it will be like. Thank You for showing us these things. Give us the wisdom to call upon You now before these terrifying events come to pass. Thank You, O God! Amen.

And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Revelation 16:18

As a note concerning manuscripts, the order of the three events is different depending on which manuscript is used –

> And there were <u>flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder</u>; (NASB)
> And there were <u>noises and thunderings and lightnings</u>; (NKJV)

Whichever is correct, the idea remains the same in both regardless of the order. With that understood, John begins with, "And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings."

Following the pattern of previous instances (Revelation 4:5 & 11:19), these accompany the spoken words of the previous voice which said, "It is done." There is a difference, however, in that mentioning these events in Revelation 4 and 11 formed the close of the judgments. In this case, mentioning them serves to introduce the result of the last bowl judgment. That result begins with "and there was a great earthquake."

This is a form of judgment all by itself, especially as it is noted within the prophecy. Earthquakes are a part of the normal events of the earth and cannot always be considered as some form of judgment. But this one, being prophesied in advance, and being connected with other events in the narrative, is to be taken as a direct judgment.

Of this earthquake, John says it is “such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth.”

This earthquake is not to be spiritualized into something like “turmoil within the church,” or some other such analysis. Rather, the description of it, and the effects resulting from it, are spoken of as literal events. It is a cataclysm that will shake the entire earth. The effects of it will be seen in the next verses.

Life application: In Revelation 6:12, during the opening of the 6th seal, there was an earthquake. Again, in Revelation 8:5, after the opening of the 7th seal and prior to the sounding of the 7 trumpets, there were “noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.” Next in Revelation 11:13 during the 2nd woe and prior to the sounding of the 7th trumpet, “a tenth of the city fell [and] in the earthquake seven thousand people were killed.” This was at the time of the resurrection of the two witnesses. Then a little later, after the sounding of the 7th trumpet (which would precede the 7 bowl judgments), it said –

> “Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.” Revelation 11:19

The time of tribulation will be a time of great upheaval on the earth and there will be much destruction from these events. However, the magnitude of the earthquake described in verse 16:18 will be far more immense.

News flash: For those who believe Revelation is concerning events that were fulfilled in the past, these cataclysms have never occurred before, and in particular this great earthquake cannot be identified as a fulfilled event. Therefore, again as has been pointed out many times, the book of Revelation is speaking about future events, most especially surrounding the unrepentant of the world and Israel, not the church.

Verses such as this one cannot be “spiritualized” without destroying the entire context of what is being relayed. The world is (future) coming under God’s judgment and when these events occur, they will be without precedent in their size and scope.

The very shape of the earth and its rotational speed and axis will likely be affected in an enormous way from the earthquake which is predicted in this verse. If this is so, it may explain other events that will come about during the millennium concerning the nature of the world, the longer lifespan of people at that time, and so on.

However, before that time of marvel and beauty arrives, the world must go through terrible times. The tribulation is not a time any sane person would voluntarily want to enter. And so, if the warning of the book of Revelation is understood, the reader should opt to avoid that time by calling out today for God's provision in the giving of His Son. God will keep those who come to Him out of this time to come. So, call on Him today. Call out to JESUS!

Lord, we know that Your judgments are just and that in righteousness they are executed. Thank You that we have the complete assurance that nothing is done in an arbitrary manner, but Your judgments are a result of our own failures in Your presence. And so, thank You for the mercy You have provided through the giving of Your Son. Because of this, we stand and praise You forever. Amen.

Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Revelation 16:19

The previous verse referred to a great earthquake, one greater than has occurred in all of human history. The result of this is stated now, saying, "Now the great city was divided into three parts." In the coming clause, it will speak of "great Babylon." For this reason, many scholars conclude that this is the city being referred to in this clause as well. Further, the next two chapters will deal with Babylon. However, this is not completely certain.

It could be that this is first a reference to Jerusalem, and only after that is the fall of Babylon described. Jerusalem is called "the great city" in verse 11:8, and so it could be a reference to the cataclysm that is coming as described by Zechariah –

> 3 "Then the LORD will go forth
> And fight against those nations,
> As He fights in the day of battle.
> 4 And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
> Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
> And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,
> From east to west,
> *Making* a very large valley;
> Half of the mountain shall move toward the north
> And half of it toward the south.
> 5 Then you shall flee *through* My mountain valley,
> For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal.

Yes, you shall flee
As you fled from the earthquake
In the days of Uzziah king of Judah.
Thus the LORD my God will come,
And all the saints with You." Zechariah 14:3-5

For the entire Mount of Olives, which is in the location of Jerusalem, to split in two would indicate a massive earthquake. Further, the same earthquake could also divide Jerusalem elsewhere, thus causing it to divide into three sections. Therefore, this could be speaking of Jerusalem.

However, it could also be referring to Babylon in advance of naming it. Babylon is called "the great city" in verses 14:8, 17:18, 18:18, 18:19, and 18:21. Therefore, this is a likely candidate as well. Either way, Babylon will see its entire destruction, something not necessarily implied in this clause now. John next says, "and the cities of the nations fell."

It is another clue that the first clause is speaking of Jerusalem. The cities of the nations are distinguished from Jerusalem in this clause, and then they will be distinguished from Babylon in the next clause. Or it could be referring to the headship of Babylon. Just as Babylon fell, so will the cities that were under the authority of Babylon. This would then make the earthquake symbolic rather than literal, something not likely from the description of the earthquake.

Either way, whether literal or symbolic, and whether Jerusalem or Babylon, the events are future and so it is better to consider both options, knowing that the events will be known as fulfilled when they occur. With this in mind, John next says, "And great Babylon was remembered before God."

This seems to put "the great city" in opposition to Jerusalem. Otherwise, it would not appear necessary to say the same thing again. However, it could be a literary device where the second thought names and further describes the first thought, placing the two in apposition. Either way, the final clause of the verse is directed to Babylon, regardless as to which city the first clause was referring to. God will remember great Babylon in order "to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath."

The cup has already been used as a descriptor of judgment and punishment in Revelation. In Chapter 14, it said –

> [9]"Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his

hand, [10] he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which
is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented
with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of
the Lamb." Revelation 14:9, 10

Those who worship the beast and his image, and who receive his mark, will drink of the cup of God's wrath. Likewise, great Babylon will also drink of such a cup. For her, a complete end will come. When God is done with Babylon, it shall never rise again.

Life application: As the events of Revelation are future, and because symbols are used to represent other things at times, it's hard to be dogmatic about whom "great Babylon" is.

There are various thoughts that have been pondered over the years. One is that it is actually Babylon of the past, and which is resurrected in modern times. It was destroyed long ago, and today it will be rebuilt into a center of power. This idea has especially developed in recent history when Saddam Hussein began rebuilding it during his time. The area has been the focus of much change in recent years. It could be that because of Islamic growth on the world stage, it will again be a center for rebellion of the world against the true God.

Another option is that this is speaking of Jerusalem. Revelation is highly focused on the Jewish people as they are readied for the return of the Messiah. In Zechariah 13:9, we read the purpose of the affliction of the trials coming upon Israel –

"I will bring the *one*–third through the fire,
Will refine them as silver is refined,
And test them as gold is tested.
They will call on My name,
And I will answer them.
I will say, 'This *is* My people';
And each one will say, 'The Lord *is* my God.'"

As noted in the main commentary, in the next chapter of Zechariah, the Mount of Olives is said to split in two when the Lord returns. This would certainly be caused by a cataclysmic event. Therefore, Jerusalem is a possibility. However, what seems most likely is that "Babylon" is a code word for Rome.

The description of Babylon will continue through the next two chapters, and there we will see terminology which certainly seems to point to Rome. Further, Daniel 9 shows

that the antichrist will be a Roman. As an additional justification for this being Rome, we can look to the words of Peter in his first epistle –

> "She who is in Babylon, elect together with *you,* greets you; and *so does* Mark my son." 1 Peter 5:13

Peter, writing from Rome, identifies that city as "Babylon." He was writing to the "pilgrims of the dispersion," meaning Jewish people. The placement of the book of Peter within the Bible and the addressees in his epistle certainly point to a prophetic note that "Babylon" of the future is centered in Rome. Also, the descriptions to come seem to point to the workings of Rome throughout the church age, specifically in its treatment of the saints of God.

Wherever it ultimately proves to be, God will "remember" her. This doesn't mean He ever forgot the deeds of this city, but that He is calling it to account for its harlotry and idolatry; it will now be judged, receiving its cup of judgment.

It is important to remember that Christ also took the cup of God's wrath upon Himself. It was delivered to the Lord on the night of His crucifixion –

> "And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, **42** saying, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.'" Luke 22:41, 42

The wrath that each person rightly deserves was given to the Lord to drink, and He willingly accepted it. God's wrath for our sins was poured out on Him during the torture before the cross and during His actual death upon the cross. Because our sin was judged in Him, it can never be judged again. We are washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.

However, for those who have not accepted His offer of peace, there is only one choice left – to face God's wrath apart from Christ Jesus. The cup which will be poured out on the world will be without mercy, and it will be exhaustive in its purging of evil from the world. Be wise and call out to God now. Receive the pardon that Christ purchased for you through the giving of Himself. Call today on JESUS.

Lord Jesus, You took the punishment that we rightly deserve upon Yourself. All of the Father's wrath for the sins we have committed were judged in You. We accept the payment rendered and the pardon which is offered. We give to You our allegiance, our hearts, our souls, and our love. May You alone be praised for the restored relationship between God and each one of us! Thank You, Lord! Amen.

Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. Revelation 16:20

The previous verses referred to the mightiest earthquake that ever occurred since men were on earth, and that the great city (Jerusalem or Babylon) was divided in three parts. Further, the cities of the nations fell, and Babylon was remembered before God as being ripe for judgment. It is possible that what is referred to is symbolic. However, it is (as previously noted) more likely to be taken literally.

It must be remembered that at the time of the flood of Noah, a real event in human history, there would have been immense cataclysms and upheavals of the land. And yet, what was stated in those previous two verses is said to be greater than even that. The importance of this will be analyzed now in this verse. In it, John begins with, "Then every island fled away." The thought here has already been seen in verse 6:14 –

> "Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place."

Various suggestions were proposed as to whether what was said there was literal, symbolic, and so on. The same may be applied to this verse, or it could be that one is symbolic, and one is literal. These events are future and what occurs will be understood at that time to be the fulfillment of the event.

If the events now are literal, it does not mean that there will be no more islands after the event. It probably means that the islands are actually rocked on their very foundations and probably inundated with giant waves that would accompany such an earthquake. The islands of the world would appear to be swimming in the movement of the oceans, seas, and lakes.

John next says, "and the mountains were not found." Mountains arise through geologic movement, and mountains will be leveled by them as well. These things are, of course, assuming that the events are to be taken literally. Rereading the commentary on verse 6:14 will explain both possibilities as a reminder.

However, as this is at the end of the tribulation period, the direct question is more relevant than before, "Is this literal or symbolic?" Based on the fact that it occurs in conjunction with "a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth," it probably should be taken as literal. The entire topography of the earth will be changed.

What would be the importance of this then? It is because the earth was in a different state before the flood than after it. People lived longer, meat was not given to them for food yet, and so on. These things were surely because of the physical makeup of the earth at that time. What is likely is that the size of the earth and the timing of the earth's rotation will also be affected by this earthquake.

The Bible is consistently based on a 360-day year, regardless of how our calendars line up with events. This 360-day year is known as the "prophetic calendar" and was more than probably the way the world's rotation was originally designed. It is likely that at the time of the flood, this was changed, but the Bible continues to use this pattern for its dating – even through the book of Revelation. Recent earthquakes have moderately affected the earth's rotation (by milliseconds), but this one will be so large, it may return things to what was originally intended.

Of course, this is all speculation, but the restoration of that which has been lost is a major theme of the Bible and so this may be true with the planet's timing as well. Along with this is the prospect of mountains being leveled and islands being removed. This is hard to imagine, but so was flying to the moon just a few short decades ago. Just because we can't mentally grasp what is depicted doesn't mean that it can't happen.

There will certainly be an entirely different ecosystem on the earth when this occurs. The changes will be so pronounced that Isaiah says –

> "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
> The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
> The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
> And a little child shall lead them.
> **7** The cow and the bear shall graze;
> Their young ones shall lie down together;
> And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
> **8** The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,
> And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.
> **9** They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
> For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
> As the waters cover the sea." Isaiah 11:6-9

Further, the age of man will again be able to attain hundreds of years –

> "No more shall an infant from there *live but a few* days,
> Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days;

For the child shall die one hundred years old,
But the sinner *being* one hundred years old shall be accursed.
21 They shall build houses and inhabit *them;*
They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
They shall not plant and another eat;
For as the days of a tree, *so shall be* the days of My people,
And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." -Isaiah 65:20-22

Certainly, big changes are coming in the time ahead. What will bring about these changes so that what was lost will be restored during the millennium? It appears that just as a great set of cataclysmic events took place before the flood and brought the world out of the original design, it may be that another set of cataclysmic events will bring it back into a harmonious design that will positively affect the very nature of life on earth.

Life application: Whatever is coming in the future, it will be glorious. A time of great peace on earth will occur, and the people of the world will receive the wonder and marvel that is prophesied for that time to come. However, before that occurs, there will be such great destruction on the planet that the vast majority of humanity will be annihilated.

Because these things are certain, it is important that people wake up to the truth of God in Christ now. Without Him, there is only anticipated death and separation from God. But through faith in Him, there is life and restoration. Let us put our hope and confidence in God's provision today. Let us set our hearts, minds, and affections on God's Messiah, our Lord JESUS!

Lord, we look forward to the time when the world shall be full of the knowledge of who You are and the great deeds You have accomplished. Until then, let us work diligently to bring many to a saving knowledge of You, so that they too can share in the wondrous day ahead when You rule and reign on Your glorious throne. Amen.

And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each *hailstone* about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great. Revelation 16:21

The previous verses referred to the great earthquake and its associated terrors. This final verse of Chapter 16 continues with that theme, saying, "And great hail from heaven fell upon men." Hail was one of the plagues of Egypt as is described in Exodus 9:22-32.

That account was hail that was mingled with fire that was "so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation" (Exodus 9:24).

In this account, it is not so much the volume as in Egypt, but it is rather the weight of the hail. As John says, "each hailstone about the weight of a talent." A talent is approximately 75 pounds. Because of this, the effect will be devastating.

If this is to be taken literally, one possibility to explain such great hail is that the great earthquake mentioned in the preceding verses will cause such great atmospheric changes that massive hailstones will result. Or it could be that along with the earthquake, other events occurred which caused great amounts of debris to be cast into the air, and which then falls back to earth as if hailstones.

A third possibility is that a major meteor hits the earth which would cause:

1) a change in the earth's rotation
2) a massive earthquake
3) breakaway meteorite chunks flying everywhere (hail)
4) Lots of debris once it hits

Whatever the cause of them, in the Bible they are considered their own form of judgment. This is seen elsewhere besides the exodus account, such as –

> "The LORD will cause His glorious voice to be heard,
> And show the descent of His arm,
> With the indignation of *His* anger
> And the flame of a devouring fire,
> *With* scattering, tempest, and hailstones." Isaiah 30:30

Hail as judgment is also seen in the Psalms, other passages in Isaiah, in Ezekiel, and in Haggai –

> "I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not *turn* to Me,' says the LORD." Haggai 2:17

An event of hailstones falling on Israel's enemies during battle is seen in Joshua 10:11 as well. The terror of hail is that there is no way to know where or when it will land. Like being in an artillery barrage, there is no certainty of life from moment to moment. Because of such terror, John says, "Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail."

It is the same reaction as that of the pouring out of the fourth bowl. Instead of appealing to God, the people will blaspheme Him. The minds of the people will be so twisted and corrupt that they curse the Creator, as if it could have any effect on Him. The hail was prophesied in advance, showing that even if it is a result of the earthquake or some other natural event, it was known to – and allowed by – God to occur. And yet they still blaspheme Him "since that plague was exceedingly great."

The judgment of hail is great because the sin of the people is great. The judgment is just and right. It is not unlike that which will occur during the battle of Gog and Magog as is recorded in Ezekiel 38 –

> "And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who *are* with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. **23** Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I *am* the LORD." Ezekiel 38:22, 23

Life application: These occurrences have come about ,and will come about, because of the sins of the people and a rejection of God.

This is the state of depravity in the human heart. We ignore God, claim He doesn't exist, and we fight against Him. But when tragedy strikes, we blame Him and curse His name. Our words and actions toward God are usually contradictory. Instead of acknowledging His sovereign greatness, we exalt ourselves above Him by judging His actions.

But humanity is a part of creation, and God has every right to dispense with His creatures in whatever way He deems is appropriate. The amazing thing isn't that God doesn't keep us from harm. The amazing thing is that He lets us live at all. We have sinned, we have failed to recognize His glory, we find other avenues to pursue from day to day without having Him as our greatest joy.

Despite these things, He took the initiative in order to reconcile us to Himself. He accomplished the work, He sent His Son, and He allowed us to crucify Him. All that is needed to bring us back to Himself was accomplished by Him. And all He asks for is that we will just believe. Let us turn to Him through this marvelous message of reconciliation. Let us praise Him forevermore for the giving of His Son, JESUS.

It is hard to imagine how unclear our thoughts are toward You, O God. We try to hide from You and we speak ill of You – as if You couldn't hear. We even curse You when we receive Your stern hand of discipline and correction. Were it not for Jesus, we certainly

would be utterly swept away. Thank You for Jesus! Thank You for peace and hope through Him. Amen.

CHAPTER 17

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, Revelation 17:1

With the pouring out of the seven bowls of God's wrath complete, the first verse of Chapter 17 now begins two chapters concerning the destruction of Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots. The fall of Babylon has already been mentioned twice already. The first time was in chapter 14 when the three angels made their proclamations. The second time was in the preceding chapter at the time of the great earthquake.

The big question regarding these references to Babylon for scholars of Revelation – almost as big as what the number of the beast signifies – is, "Who is this great harlot." There are several views, and the debate is both heated and often bitter. One view is that it is a worldwide system of all the false religions on earth. Some who hold to this view include politics as a part of the system – a political/religious system that is in opposition to God.

A second view is that this is a religious system centered specifically in Rome. A sub view of this is that it is the Roman Catholic Church, both in past history and leading up to and through the tribulation period. A third view is that the location is actually Babylon in Iraq which has been rebuilt and from which spiritual leadership is exercised. And a fourth suggestion is that it is a system centered in Jerusalem rather than Rome or physical Babylon.

Of course, there are many other views – it is America, it is the EU, it is this or that… It is hard to be dogmatic about much of what is presented, but each verse will be analyzed, and the most probable location and concept will be identified as we progress.

For now, it should be noted that it is one of the seven angels with the seven bowls who speaks to John. As this opening verse says, "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me."

Which of the seven angels this is remains unstated. Therefore, the angel's identity in regard to the pouring out of the seven bowls is irrelevant to the narrative. In other words, it could be the sixth saying to John, "Here comes the seventh bowl. Watch what happens to Babylon with this!" Or, it could be the seventh, saying, "Watch what I will now do to Babylon!" This is intentionally left out, and so the speculation that many

devolve into over the identity of the angel is pointless. What matters is what this angel presents to John. He says, “Come.”

The Greek word is *deuro*. It does not necessarily signify motion, although it could. Jesus used it when calling forth Lazarus from the tomb. But Paul uses it in the sense of “the present time” when he said in Romans 1:13, “but was hindered until now.” Being an adverb, the thought now might be, “Presently, I will show...”

With this call, the angel then says, “I will show you.” It indicates that everything to be presented is a description of what will occur during the bowl judgment. What is seen then explains more fully what was said in Chapter 16 with the words, “And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.”

This is the same in idea as that of the sixth day of Genesis 1 being explained more fully in Genesis 2. The Bible introduces a subject, and then details are later filled in. The book of Ruth is an insert into the time of the Judges, which is the book that precedes Ruth. John saw the bowl poured out, and now he will see that presented in a more detailed manner. The angel next says it is “the judgment.”

In other words, what follows is a careful explanation of the wrath of God being poured out upon the object of what the contents of the bowl are directed to, which is the judgment “of the great harlot.”

The symbolism here is taken from elsewhere in Scripture. A city is identified by its conduct. In this case, the conduct of the city is that of harlotry. This was stated of Jerusalem –

> “How the faithful city has become a harlot!
> It was full of justice;
> Righteousness lodged in it,
> But now murderers.” Isaiah 1:21

As a city is a representation of its people, the same thought is extended to the people of the city directly at times –

> “Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit harlotry, and led Judah astray.”
>
> -2 Chronicles 21:11

Such terminology is not limited to Jerusalem but is used to refer to Samaria as well in Ezekiel 23. It is further used when referring to Tyre in Isaiah 23. The idea is that of spiritual harlotry against the Lord. Of this harlot in Revelation 17, the angel identifies her as one "who sits on many waters."

This is an Old Testament reference to Babylon –

> "O you who dwell by many waters,
> Abundant in treasures,
> Your end has come,
> The measure of your covetousness." Jeremiah 51:13

However, what was presented of Babylon was only a physical location anticipating a spiritual Babylon. Ancient Babylon was by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and was surrounded by the various lakes and wetlands adjoined to them. This reference to "many waters" now in Revelation is explicitly defined in verse 17:15 –

> "Then he said to me, 'The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.'"

What ancient Babylon was in a physical sense was only a type of what the Babylon of Revelation is in a spiritual sense.

With this description now provided, it should be noted and compared with the introduction of another female figure coming later in Revelation –

> "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters.'" Revelation 17:1

> "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.'" Revelation 21:9

By noting the different introductions of these two, one can see that they are being set in opposition to one another. The theme is being developed for the reader to show the contrast between the two.

<u>Life application:</u> Throughout the Bible, a harlot is used to refer to religion that is defiled, or outright false religion. There is One Maker, and He deserves pure and undefiled

religion. When worship of Him is mixed with falsities, or when it is rejected entirely, that worshiper, congregation, or people group is in a state of prostitution, and the mode of worship is considered harlotry.

The Lord expects His people to honor Him. Being called as His people, and then allowing false religion into their lives, brought great trouble and destruction upon the people of Israel. The seven letters to the seven churches show that those who identify with Him are not immune to this. Our worship of the Lord is to be pure and untainted. We follow a great God and a glorious Savior. We follow JESUS!

Lord God, You have shown us what pure and undefiled religion consists of. You have sent Your Son to cleanse us from our past religious failures and to lead us into true worship. And You have given us Your Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and lead us into all righteousness. Help us to properly worship You and never mix error into our fellowship with You. Amen.

with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." Revelation 17:2

The words of this verse should be combined with verse 17:1 to get a full view of what is conveyed –

> "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, **2** with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.'"

Having the context, John begins verse 17:2 saying, "with whom the kings of the earth." The kings of the earth speak of the world system of government. The nations have their own governmental structures, and they are not united with the Lord in any particular manner, even if some of their citizens are. They are simply the governments that exist and by which the people of the earth engage in their affairs.

Of these kings of the earth, John says that this great harlot has "committed fornication." Of this thought, Vincent's Word Studies notes –

"The figure of a harlot committing fornication with kings and peoples occurs frequently in the prophets, representing the defection of God's Church and its attachment to others. See Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 2:20; Jeremiah 3:1, Jeremiah 3:6, Jeremiah 3:8; Ezekiel

16:15, Ezekiel 16:16, Ezekiel 16:28, Ezekiel 16:31, Ezekiel 16:35, Ezekiel 16:41; Ezekiel 23:5, Ezekiel 23:19, Ezekiel 23:44; Hosea 2:5; Hosea 3:3; Hosea 4:14. The word is applied to heathen cities in three places only: to Tyre, Isaiah 23:15, Isaiah 23:16, Isaiah 23:17; to Nineveh, Nahum 3:4; and here."

Due to the nature of this concept, that of fornication referring to "God's Church" an overwhelming number of times, this is an immediate indication that it is referring to a body claiming to be aligned with the Lord, but which has defected from what is right, sound, and proper.

But more directly, these instances cited by Vincent's speak of people groups (such as Israel) and cities (such as Jerusalem, Tyre, and Nineveh). There is the merging of what is profane into what occurs in them – idolatry, turning from the Lord, and so on.

As will be seen, the final verse of the chapter identifies this harlot, Mystery Babylon, as "that great city which rules over the kings of the earth." This is explicit, and there is no reason to assume that the word "city" means anything other than an actual city. Of this city, John next says, "and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk."

The inhabitants of the earth include, but are not limited to, the kings of the earth. This city, which is a great harlot, has influence around the world and among people within many governments. These people have participated in her adulteries, being led not to the Lord, but astray from the Lord. This, even though the city claims to be aligned with the Lord. This is evidenced in the words, "were made drunk."

The idea of drunkenness is that of spiritual waywardness, pursuing idolatry, and the like, all of which is leading to punishment. The theme is seen especially in the prophets. A notable example is seen when speaking of Judah in Ezekiel –

> "For thus says the Lord GOD: 'Surely I will deliver you into the hand of those you hate, into the hand *of those* from whom you alienated yourself. **29** They will deal hatefully with you, take away all you have worked for, and leave you naked and bare. The nakedness of your harlotry shall be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotry. **30** I will do these *things* to you because you have gone as a harlot after the Gentiles, because you have become defiled by their idols. **31** You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will put her cup in your hand.'
> **32** "Thus says the Lord GOD:
> 'You shall drink of your sister's cup,
> The deep and wide one;
> You shall be laughed to scorn

And held in derision;
It contains much.
33 You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow,
The cup of horror and desolation,
The cup of your sister Samaria.
34 You shall drink and drain it,
You shall break its shards,
And tear at your own breasts;
For I have spoken,'
Says the Lord GOD." Ezekiel 23:28-34

This is what is now being portrayed by John. And so, he finishes with, "with the wine of her fornication. This city is responsible for leading the inhabitants of the earth astray from the Lord through her actions of idolatry and spiritual prostitution. Wine represents a cultural expression where the mingling of things occurs. In this case, there is the mingling of what is supposed to be true religion with that which is idolatrous. In giving this wine to the inhabitants of the world, they become drunk with the idolatry of the harlot.

So, the question to be put forth before continuing on in this chapter is, "Can you think of a spiritual body, supposedly aligned with the Lord, based in a single city, which is filled with idolatry, and which conducts its affairs on a global scale, including making alliances with the leaders of nations? If so, you can then see if the pattern in the verses ahead continues to describe that religious city that you have in mind.

Life application: There is one God and one way to approach Him. It is the Bible that reveals this one way. Therefore, any other religious system on earth, no matter whether it contains snippets of truth or not, is false. And, it is certain, even some religions which stem from the Bible are false because they manipulate it in ways that twist the truth it contains. Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses are two of the many cults which have sprung from the Bible, but which bear no resemblance to the truth contained in it.

Because the Bible is God's revelation of Himself to the world, it is the source of how to have a loving and close relationship with Him. In it, we find that God desires this type of intimate relationship. However, this beautiful relationship is violated when we participate in religious or philosophical systems which pull us away from what He has ordained. And so, the metaphor of harlotry is used.

Just as a harlot seduces us and draws us away from our marriage partner, false religion pulls us away from our God. This type of spiritual fornication is unacceptable to God.

Today we see the world heading towards a worldwide system of false religion. Indeed, the whole world is moving towards this system.

Add in a charismatic world leader, the antichrist, and there will be almost universal idolatry of him and the following of whatever religious system he espouses or aligns with. Add in the false prophet who will lend credence to this thought, and you can see how easily the world will be duped into its plunge into perdition. What is coming will be so far from the truth of the Bible that there will be no remedy. Instead, God will judge this great harlot and destruction will come upon her.

The way to avoid this is to have one's mind aligned properly with God as He has revealed Himself. And the way to do that is to read and know the Bible – His inspired and breathed out word to us. What it says is coming is already in the works, and countless masses will be led astray – all because they failed to check the word. It is all there, and it is a message that tells us to fix our eyes on JESUS.

O God, You have held out Your hands to the people of the world and beckoned us to come and fellowship with You. You've given us everything we need to do so, and You alone have paved a spacious highway for us to follow. But we, like straying sheep, look for any other avenue other than the right one. Lead us, O great Shepherd, and keep us from straying. Amen.

So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. Revelation 17:3

John is now given a new direction in his vision which explains who is the "great harlot" that verses 1 and 2 referred to. In this, it says, "So he (meaning the angel of verse 1) carried me away in the Spirit." This is thus an explanatory vision. It is what occurred with Ezekiel several times. One such time was –

> "And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth *month,* on the fifth *day* of the month, as I sat in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me there. **2** Then I looked, and there was a likeness, like the appearance of fire—from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the color of amber. **3** He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner *court,* where the seat of the image of jealousy *was,* which provokes to

jealousy. **4** And behold, the glory of the God of Israel *was* there, like the vision that I saw in the plain." Ezekiel 8:1-4

As can be seen, Ezekiel was among others. His physical body remained, but he was taken in a vision to see events selected by the Lord for him to then relay. This is the same now with John. In his vision, John is taken "into the wilderness."

The wilderness in Scripture is a place of trial and testing. It can also be a place of closeness to God or separation from God, depending on the subject. For example, Charles Ellicott notes –

"The woman clothed with the sun (Revelation 12:1), persecuted by the dragon, finds a home in the wilderness into which she is driven. She is persecuted, but not forsaken; she can joy in tribulation. The scarlet-clad woman, amid all her dazzling surroundings, is still in a wilderness."

What John next sees is a rather remarkable thing. He says, "And I saw a woman." The angel has already called this woman "the great harlot who sits on many waters." He also has said of her that it is she "with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication" (17:2).

At the end of the chapter, the angel will explicitly say that this woman, "is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (17:18). Of this woman, it says she is "sitting on a scarlet beast." Due to the description that follows, it can be inferred that this is the same as the "beast out of the sea" of Chapter 13.

Taking the symbolism from the Old Testament, scarlet, or red, in the Bible pictures and symbolizes war, blood, and/or judgment. Thus, it can be inferred that this beast is an entity that is warring, bloody, subject to judgment, or delivering judgment (see vv. 13:4 & 13:7). Further, this beast is "full of names of blasphemy."

This corresponds to verse 13:1, which described the beast as having, "seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name." The names of blasphemy are recorded there, but so also are the continued parts of the description now being given, which says, "having seven heads."

Later in this chapter, the seven heads are said to be "seven mountains" (17:9) and also seven kings (17:10). The word for "mountains" can simply mean "hills." Either is an

acceptable translation. The word can also be taken literally, or it can be taken as a metaphor for a government entity. Finally, the verse ends with, “and ten horns.”

The ten horns are specifically said to be ten kings in verse 7:12. The description is now given, and it will be built upon in the verses to come.

Life application: The things John is seeing in his vision are identifiable as to what the things mean – scarlet, a beast, horns, and so on. The meaning is generally clear from such things already found in Scripture. However, the actual identification of them is not explicitly stated. Further, whether some are literal or are metaphors (such as the mountains) is unknown. Therefore, what is presented can be turned into countless points of conjecture.

Being dogmatic about a single interpretation is not the wise path to follow. And yet, an analysis must be made with one’s best interpretive guesses. In the end, time will meet up with the prophetic utterances, and the two will come together, revealing the truth of all of the symbolism. When it happens, the truth of Scripture will be seen.

For now, let us consider the words of Revelation as God’s inspired word. It is showing us, in advance, that He already knows what is coming and how it will all pan out. Because of this, we can be absolutely confident that what it says about the victory ahead is certain. In the end, there is victory, because at the end there is JESUS.

Heavenly Father, You have revealed future events to us in Your word because You want us to study them and stretch our minds as we think them through. Help us to see clearly into what You intend for us to see and help us to not fight over the things which are yet hidden from our view. May our studies of Your word be edifying to us and bring glory to You. Amen.

The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. Revelation 17:4

The great harlot named in verse 17:1, meaning the city being described in the vision, is described further in this verse. Of her, John says, “The woman.” This is repeated from the previous verse where he said, “And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast.” As noted then, this term is used to describe a city. That will be stated explicitly in verse 17:18 –

> "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

Therefore, the imagery given here is metaphor and needs to be evaluated from that perspective. Of this woman, John says she "was arrayed in purple and scarlet." The two words have a close enough appearance that both are used to describe the robe placed upon Christ. First is *porphurous*, or purple. That is seen only in John's gospel (twice) and here in Revelation (twice). One instance from John says –

> "And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe." John 19:2

The other word, *kokkinos*, or purple, is found in Matthew when referring to the robe placed upon the Lord –

> "And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. **29** When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put *it* on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'"
>
> -Matthew 27:28, 29

Whether this is the same robe in both accounts, as some assume, or whether it is a different robe placed upon Jesus (one by Herod as is seen in Luke 23:11, and the other by the soldiers of Pilate), the point of using both words in Revelation is probably to show that this woman identifies with Christ. Both the scarlet color (war, blood, and judgment) and the purple (nobility/royalty) were used to describe that which was placed upon Him. This woman is an entity that appears to be emulating Him by being arrayed in both colors.

John next continues with, "and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls." The word translated as "adorned" signifies to be gilded with. Gold speaks of purity, holiness, royalty, and divinity. Next, the Greek says, "stone precious." The singular stands for the plural. The same idea was presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3 –

> "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, **13** each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." 1 Corinthians 3:11-13

Obviously, Paul is using the term to refer to works worthy of reward. The *margarités*, or "pearl," is used in parables by Jesus to refer to the precious teachings (spiritual truths) of the gospel. That is seen, for example, in Matthew 7:6 and 13:45 –

> "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." (7:6)

> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, **46** who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." (13:45, 46)

One can see that this city is supposedly identified with Christ. It is adorned with robes as He was, it is a city basing its splendor on works and upon the wisdom found in the gospel. However, it is a harlot – meaning it has prostituted itself – betraying its calling and scorning the One she is identified with. Only in pretense is she aligned with the things of God. However, in reality (as John continues), she is "having in her hand a golden cup."

This takes the reader back to the description of Babylon from Jeremiah 51 –

> "Flee from the midst of Babylon,
> And every one save his life!
> Do not be cut off in her iniquity,
> For this *is* the time of the LORD's vengeance;
> He shall recompense her.
> **7** Babylon *was* a golden cup in the LORD's hand,
> That made all the earth drunk.
> The nations drank her wine;
> Therefore the nations are deranged.
> **8** Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed.
> Wail for her!
> Take balm for her pain;
> Perhaps she may be healed.
> **9** We would have healed Babylon,
> But she is not healed.
> Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country;
> For her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies." Jeremiah 51:6-9

The harlot of Revelation is not unlike Babylon of old. She has a golden cup in her hand, signifying wrath and judgment, and this will be brought down upon her as well. Of this cup, John says it is "full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication."

The Greek word *bdelugma*, translated as "abomination," signifies an accursed thing. It is that which emits a foul odor. Thus, figuratively, it is a moral horror. It is something that is a stench to God. It reflects those who refuse to listen to and obey His voice.

The word translated as "filthiness" signifies something that is not pure because it is mixed. Morally, it is that which is tainted by sin.

Finally, the word "fornication" means sexual impurity and that which is idolatrous. There is a selling off, or surrendering, of purity.

The question to consider concerning this woman is, "Is there a city that fits the description of this harlot in the world today? One that identifies with Christ, bases itself on good works and the pomp and majesty of the Christian faith, and yet which is filled with abominations and idolatry?"

Life application: This great harlot bears little resemblance to the woman depicted in verse 12:1, 2 – "Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. **2** Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth."

Whereas the woman in chapter 12 is clothed with the sun – something created by God and without change by man – the great harlot is arrayed in purple and scarlet. These are materials that require forming and shaping by man's hands, and then they have dyes applied to them. Rather than bearing the radiance and glory of the Creator, they reflect the things that are lusted after by the world.

These garments and their colors indicate wealth, status, and royalty. The great harlot is also "adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls." The adornment of the woman in chapter 12 is "a garland of 12 stars." Again, the stars are created by God; the adornments of the harlot are materials that are cut, melted, set, and/or shaped by the hands of men. They are external refinements that hide the true state of who she is.

Remember, this harlot is symbolic of something else and not actually a person. This entity has all the appearance of finery, status, and majesty; and yet it is an abomination to God. The idea of fornication is used throughout the Bible when speaking of the intermingling of false religion with the truth, or false religion completely substituting the

truth in God's people. This harlot is a religious entity that has completely compromised itself to filth, abominable practices, and apostasy. It has taken the truth of the gospel and changed it. This is something Paul calls "anathema" in Galatians chapter 1.

What city is there today that fits this description? Be advised that the gospel is not based on works, but on faith in Jesus Christ. Acceptable works are derived from faith in Christ. Let us remember that God alone has done all that is necessary for man to be saved. It is only faith in what He has done that this comes about. The gospel is about God's provision as is found in the giving of JESUS.

Lord, here we are – given the beauty of Your truth in the pages of Your word. And yet, we change it and pervert it. We mix in falsity with it and then pass that on to others instead of simply trusting that what You have given us is right, proper, and sufficient. Turn our hearts to Your word alone and let us rest in that. Amen.

And on her forehead a name *was* written:
MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT,
THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS
OF THE EARTH. Revelation 17:5

This is referring to the great harlot John has been describing. Of her, he says, "And on her forehead a name *was* written."

Scholars of the past have noted that prostitutes of the past actually had their names tied in a circlet which was then displayed on their foreheads as a label. This would be similar to how people at a store will wear a name badge today. The forehead is the most prominent and visual place where anyone can see the identification plainly and immediately.

In other words, nothing is hidden about this. It is obvious and clearly exposed. The forehead is also the place of acknowledgment, such as in vows.

The High Priest of Israel wore a turban as he performed his duties and the passage from Exodus 28 notes the adornment of it –

> [36]"You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, *like* the engraving of a signet:
>
> HOLINESS TO THE LORD.

> **37** And you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban; it shall be on the front of the turban. **38** So it shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD." Exodus 28:36-38

There is a marked difference between the forehead of the high priest and that of the great harlot. Holiness and true worship are replaced with what is abominable and false. Where the High Priest (a picture of Jesus as our Mediator) bears the sins of God's people, the great whore bears her own sins and leads others into her abominations.

As noted earlier, the forehead is also the spot where the mental assertion of something is made. For this reason, Moses gave this instruction to the people of Israel concerning the laws they had received –

> "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. **7** You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. **8** You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. **9** You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Deuteronomy 6:6-8

Rather than mentally asserting that God is the Creator and worthy of holy reverence, the only mental assertion in the mind of this whore is fornication, idolatry, lust, and abominable practices. She identifies with the name next to be stated and acknowledges its position openly. And that name is:

MYSTERY – This is either a part of the name, or it is a way of saying, "This is a harlot, but it is unknown except to whom it is revealed," or it means that the name is to be understood in a spiritual sense. One (or both) of the latter two options seems more likely. In other words, this is a city and a body that is a harlot, but those who have not had the mystery revealed to them do not know it is so. Further, this is not a literal female woman who is a harlot, but she is being used as a metaphor to describe the city. This harlot has been working out her practices in a way that people don't even realize that they are following the wrong path. What they think is right is not, and yet it is hidden from them.

BABYLON THE GREAT – The name itself signifies complete confusion. Babylon comes from the Hebrew *babel*, meaning confusion. The deception of the whore is complete. What she proclaims as truth is actually a confused and twisted substitute. Following the

word *babel* back to its origin, one scholar notes that its plural form means "gate of the gods." The term was therefore used to denote all supposed avenues which led to the gods – sorcery, astrology, occult practices, humanism, idolatry, etc.

Babylon was later an empire composed of a government, a religious identification, and that warred against Israel (the people of God) through both spiritual (Ezekiel 23:11-21) and actual (innumerable references) means. This harlot will emulate ancient Babylon and will be considered a superlative example of it, the last and greatest example of the ideal of it.

THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS – Of all of the harlotry that occurs, this harlot is the preeminent one. Her name signifies that from her stems all false religion which is opposed to the truth of God. It is the one that is the beginning, or source of the others, and one which rears up all the others to act in her manner. She sets the examples for all the others in her doings. Remembering that harlotry in this sense is a turning away from God and to false religion, idolatry, and so on, this entity counterfeits right faith, but then turns its congregants away through subtlety, guiding them into apostasy.

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH – Matthew Poole says of this title, "And abominations of the earth; a place in which not only idolatry reigneth, but all abominable things committed in the world; carnal whoredom tolerated by them, and sodomy, &c." It is a place where there is vile wickedness of the heart, perversion, lusts for power, control, and (as Poole notes) sodomy. These "abominations" are unclean, perverse, filled with wickedness, and the doctrines of demons. The practices she promotes cover all "of the earth," and people from every shore are involved in her wickedness.

Looking at the description above, one can clearly identify a place that exists on earth, right now, that fits this description. It may or may not be all that is inclusive of what MYSTERY BABYLON is comprised during the tribulation, but this place, this city, is the head of it. Look at the world around you and the identification of her should be clear.

<u>Life application:</u> In the Bible, we are told to think on Jesus and to look to Him. Anything that takes our attention off of Him, or which falsely portrays His gospel message, is to be completely rejected.

We can ask ourselves, "Is there such an entity on earth that resembles Christianity and yet has departed from the truth of the gospel?" "Has this entity taken people's eyes off Jesus and directed them towards other things?" "Are practices of this entity filled with

idolatry, demonology, sorcery, and occult practices?" "Has such an entity arisen which fulfills a role unintended by the Lord when He established this church?"

If one reasonably and in an unbiased manner evaluates these questions, the answer is "Yes." And as the days progress, Mystery Babylon will be seen for what she truly is – apostasy and wickedness.

It is our obligation as believers to turn from anything that is not focused on Jesus Christ. He alone is to be our hope and our highest joy. God has appointed Him to be our one and only path to salvation. Let us rejoice in Him. Yes! Let us rejoice in JESUS!

Lord Jesus, You alone are due my reverence and my worship. No other being is worthy of any praise or prayer directed to them. Help me to be a light to others who may be caught up in the untruth of the lies of the great whore who steals men's souls away from coming to a saving knowledge of Your glorious majesty. Amen.

I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. Revelation 17:6

The previous verse found John revealing the name written on the forehead of the great harlot. Now, he will continue to describe her. However, the description goes from physical things like purple and scarlet and gold and precious stones to her conduct. In this, John says, "I saw the woman."

As stated before, this is a city (17:18) being compared to a woman. This is found in the Old Testament as well, as was previously noted. Of this woman, John next says she is "drunk with the blood of the saints."

The terminology speaks of great slaughter, as if the blood were wine, and the amount is so great that those who spill it become intoxicated with it. This is seen, for example, in the sword of the Lord being drunk in this manner in Jeremiah 46 –

> "For this *is* the day of the Lord GOD of hosts,
> A day of vengeance,
> That He may avenge Himself on His adversaries.
> The sword shall devour;
> It shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood;
> For the Lord GOD of hosts has a sacrifice
> In the north country by the River Euphrates." Jeremiah 46:10

Remembering that this is a city, the location is what is first being highlighted. Rome, the center of the Roman Empire, killed innumerable saints of the early church. It doesn't matter that this was conducted prior to its conversion to Christianity. It is the city that is being described.

The city of Rome (aka the Vatican) claiming Christianity is no more significant at this point than it is that Jerusalem followed the Lord at times and completely fell away from the Lord at others. It is the city that is described (meaning the people within it) throughout the Old Testament. Understanding this, John continues. She is not just only drunk with the blood of the saints, but also "with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."

The word translated as "martyrs" signifies "a witness." It is someone who testifies to something. The word eventually became synonymous with one who dies for his witness because this has been the lot of Christian witnesses throughout the church age.

The "witness" is what becomes the reason for their death. The cause of it, however, is that the witness is not accepted by the great whore who rejects the simplicity and truth of the witness. It is true that Christians have been martyred throughout the world and by countless other cultures and religions, but that is neither a mystery, nor is it unexpected.

However, what is revealed in the mystery of Rome is that it not only martyred the saints prior to its claim to Christianity, but it continued to do so throughout most of its history. Anyone who determined to follow the word of God, apart from the heretical doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, has been considered anathema by them. And in their declarations, they have killed countless faithful Christians in the process.

Albert Barnes says, "How applicable this is to the papacy, let the blood shed in the valleys of Piedmont; the blood shed in the Low Countries by the Duke of Alva; the blood shed on Bartholomew's day; and the blood shed in the Inquisition, testify."

Along with them are the accounts of both martyrdom and persecution of many of those of the Reformation. As a single example of those countless witnesses for Christ at this time who were persecuted and martyred for their faith, take time to read up on John Hus. The city of Rome (eventually the seat of the Roman Catholic Church) has a long history of being drunk with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs of Jesus. But who would think! John couldn't imagine, and he says, "And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement."

Here the verb, *thaumazó*, and its cognate noun, *thauma*, are both used. In essence, it says, "I was astonished with great astonishment." It is the same verb that was used in the Greek translation of Daniel 8:27 after he beheld a vision that completely overwhelmed him –

> "And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it."
>
> -Daniel 8:27

The appearance of this harlot stunned John. The finery, the extent of her reach (many waters), the names of blasphemy, and the filthiness of her fornication – all of these, along with her drunken state because of the volumes of blood of those who confess Jesus Christ was literally shocking to his eyes.

She is a great contrast to the woman of Revelation 12 who fled from persecution, whereas this harlot actively persecutes. And those saints of the end times will be in the sights of this vile whore.

Life application: This harlot – a spiritual entity who has mixed idolatrous worship with the truth of Jesus Christ – has also been instrumental in killing those who have held to His word and His testimony alone.

One can look back through the church age to see what organization it is that has been the leading proponent of killing those who disagree with their theological position. The Inquisition is just one evidence of the brutality exercised against the saints of God. The reason for these martyrdoms is seen in those who reject hierarchal levels of authority or anti-biblical teachings in order to faithfully follow the true Leader of the church – Jesus, and the one source of church doctrine – the Bible.

Anytime a body stemming from the Christian faith mixes in extra-biblical rites of worship which are contrary to the Bible, they commit spiritual harlotry. An example of this is the practice of praying to Mary or the saints. There is no biblical justification for this, and, in fact, it is anti-biblical in practice.

Increasing the guilt occurs when statues are given reverence and petition – a practice known as *idol-dulia* – the veneration of an idol. This is supposedly acceptable to those who promote the practice because they say it is in contrast to *latria* – meaning "worship" which is granted only to God. In fact, however, there is no distinction between the two. Both words are translated in the same manner from the Latin – to serve. The same is true with the translation of the Hebrew word *avad* (to worship)

which is translated as both *dulia* and *latria*. In other words, there is no actual distinction between the two.

Why is this important? Because certain groups and individuals proclaim that grace can be obtained from practicing *idol-dulia* – thus it is a practice of harlotry. Any worship, service, or veneration provided to any being or image other than God is spiritual prostitution. Any worship, service, or veneration offered to the wrong god is also. There is one God, and He has revealed Himself in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This is the reason why Hebrews 3:1 states we are to "fix our thoughts on Jesus" (NIV) and Hebrews 12:2 asks us to "fix our eyes on Jesus" (NIV). Any other spiritual attention that is granted is spiritual harlotry.

Throughout the church age, those who have held fast to the message of Jesus have suffered for their refusal to bow the knee to any lesser god – many becoming martyrs. Countless others have been led astray by these false modes of worship and their fates have been determined because of their actions.

No wonder John marveled at the great harlot in amazement. He saw the absolute perversion of the beauty and glory of the message of his Lord in the wicked dealings of men who were given charge over helpless sheep. He must have been overwhelmed at the thought of what had come about within the very church he was writing to.

Let us hold fast to our faith in Christ, and let us also be sure to reject any form of worship that is not sanctioned in Scripture. Let us hold fast to the truth of God as revealed in our precious Lord JESUS!

Heavenly Father, forgive us for any past offenses against You where we have wrongly petitioned anyone or anything other than You. We know now that we cannot pray to Mary, to the saints, or to any other person or object, except for Jesus. We understand that Jesus alone is the Mediator between us. Therefore, we will pray to You through Him alone. Amen.

But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. Revelation 17:7

In the last verse, after seeing the woman (the great harlot) "drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus," he then said, "I marveled with great amazement." John was astonished at what he had seen, and his mind could not grasp it. With that, this verse now begins with, "But the angel said to me."

This is the angel mentioned in verse 17:1 and who has been with John since then, while he has beheld the vision. Obviously, he saw John standing in awe and therefore asked, "Why did you marvel?" It is the same verb used in the previous verse, *thaumazó*. As was noted, this was the same state as Daniel was found in when he beheld his own overwhelming vision, as is recorded in the Greek translation of that verse.

The Hebrew word used in Daniel is *shamem*. It signifies astonishment or amazement as if one is utterly stupefied. This is the state that John was in. The angel realized this and called to him to direct his attention back to reality with the question. Then, to allay his overwhelmed state, he next says, "I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns."

At times, this also happened to Daniel. He was presented with visions from others, and he had his own visions at times as well. He would be affected by them because he would have to explain the meaning of them to those who had the visions, or he would need to have them explained to him by an angel. At times, parts of the interpretation of the visions he was given were withheld from him. For John, now, the identity of the woman and the beast will be made known.

The main details will include 1) the woman, 2) the beast, 3) the seven heads, and 4) the ten horns. The rest of the details should then be understandable based on knowing what these four refer to.

Life application: Visions in the Bible are used to convey symbolism that refers to real things which have or which will come about. Every portion of the symbol has meaning, no matter how insignificant. To see a vision like this then means that an entire sweep of history may be summed up in a single display. Trying to mentally grasp what is portrayed is something that surely causes sensory overload.

The angel's question to John was a reassuring way of letting him know that the meaning can be known and what is depicted is not beyond comprehension. Further, the knowledge will be imparted to him. In essence, "John, don't be overloaded. Keep your attention on the big picture and the details will be understood."

This is what we should do with the Bible as well. There are big picture themes, and there are also minute details. Together they form a whole for us to understand what God is conveying to us. The big picture themes revolve around what God will do, and has done, in the sending of the Messiah. Everything else must be taken in relation to that. God has promised, God has sent, and God will complete all things through Him.

As long as we look for Him and to Him, everything else will find its place. Therefore, let us look to JESUS.

Heavenly Father, even two thousand years after John was given the details of the book of Revelation, we still argue over its final meaning and interpretation. Help us to carefully contemplate the symbolism, but not to lose sight of the overarching theme of Revelation. You are in complete control of all things, and You know the future before it occurs. Thank you for this assurance. Amen.

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. Revelation 17:8

John was just told by the angel presenting the vision to him that the mystery of it would also be told to him. That now immediately begins to take place with the words, "The beast that you saw was, and is not."

Is this past, present, and future description from the time John was alive? If so, it would mean the entity existed prior to John's time, was not there during John's time, and it would again come in the end times.

It could also be a description of another time such as "prior to the tribulation, at the beginning of the tribulation, and then during the tribulation?" As such, it could speak of the Roman Empire that once was. Eventually, it faded and does not exist at that future time (to John). However, based on a futurist interpretation of Daniel 9, it will exist again.

This interpretation seems reasonable, and it would be in accord with Revelation 4:1 where John was told, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." He was told he would see things after his current age. Thus, it would refer to after the church age, during the tribulation.

No matter what, the "when" is important in the analysis, and we simply cannot know for sure. The matter is future, and speculation is needed because of this. With this understood, the angel next says, "and will ascend out of the bottomless pit." The bottomless pit is that which was previously described in Revelation 9.

The probable meaning here is that the beast, or at least its power, is derived from the underworld. It was, but then it was dead – it is not. And yet, it is revived during the tribulation period to its former power and glory. This makes the assumption that

Daniel's description of the Roman Empire is a suitable and likely candidate. NATO failed, the EU is failing, and yet Europe still exists and is in need of suitable leadership. A description of the Roman Empire is given in Daniel 2 –

> 'But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. **40** And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, *that kingdom* will break in pieces and crush all the others. **41** Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. **42** And *as* the toes of the feet *were* partly of iron and partly of clay, *so* the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. **43** As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay." Daniel 2:39-43

As a side note for those verses, verse 2:43 says, "they will mingle with the seed of men." This has led to some rather ridiculous interpretations, such as angels or aliens intermingling with humans and resulting in giant hybrids. We could call them Nephilim Ned and Rephaim Rhoda. This is irresponsible theology. Several translations give a much more likely reading, such as, "so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united" (NIV).

Other references to the Roman Empire are found in Daniel, and which have no past fulfillment, meaning they are pointing to a date yet future to us now –

> "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It *was* different from all the beasts that *were* before it, and it had ten horns. **8** I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, *were* eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words." Daniel 7:7, 8

Daniel 9:27, taken in proper context, also shows that the antichrist will come from the same people who destroyed the temple in AD70 – Rome. With this a possible, and even likely, scenario, we next read "and go to perdition."

The word translated as “perdition” means “destruction.” It is used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 when speaking of the antichrist, saying, “and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.” This then would correspond to Daniel 7:11 –

> “I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame.”

As these points all fit, it will be the only option given for this analysis. However, there are innumerable other evaluations of what the angel is describing to John. For now, he next says, “And those who dwell on the earth will marvel.”

This is a general reference that the beast will be remarkable enough to cause those who see it to be amazed at it. If Hitler’s Germany suddenly arose again, one could see the amazement of it in many people’s eyes. The same is true with Stalin’s Russia. Likewise, a revised Roman Empire would be considered a fantastically marvelous event. Those who will marvel at this are those “whose names are not written in the Book of Life.”

The Greek reads *epi*, upon. Thus, it says, “upon the Book,” or “upon the scroll.” This does not mean that there is a literal scroll with names written on it. What it means is that every name is known, and the details of that person are wholly known to God.

This involves the doctrine of predestination, but it does not negate the doctrine of free will. Just because God knows what will happen, it does not mean that He actively directs those things. Understanding this, the names are written in the Book of Life “from the foundation of the world.”

The Book of Life is a way of stating that there are those who are saved, and there are those who are not saved. Those who are saved have been recorded upon this Book of Life.

God is all-knowing. The outcome of all things, every event, and even every decision we make is known to Him. Thus, even at creation, what would occur within creation – from that time on and forever – is recorded in His mind. The term “from the foundation of the world” reflects this. This was also seen in verse 13:8.

In this, God knows that those people who are not recorded in the Book of Life are those that will marvel “when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.” The revival of this great beast will be a source of amazement to those who behold it, and they will willingly want to be a part of it. It gives a good explanation of why they would be so

willing to take the mark of this beast. This would then explain why they are not in the Book of Life. Each point logically fits, one after the other.

Life application: There are several verses in the Bible that are extremely hard to interpret. This is one of them. Is this beast the antichrist or is it a government system? It is hard to be dogmatic. The term is used in both ways, and which one is being referred to depends on how one interprets the other passages in conjunction with it. One may simply represent the other.

No matter what, this beast will become a source of idolatry to the people of the world – "Who is like the beast?" They will follow after it just as Germany followed after Hitler. They will put their allegiance behind it lock, stock, and barrel, and they will reject any sense of following God.

When they contemplate the beast, they will think that it is their destiny to follow it because it was, and then it wasn't, and then it appeared again. If it is the revived Roman Empire, or another such state – Islamic perhaps – the people will think that it is the fulfillment of the original intent of that state and their allegiance to it will be complete.

How much better to put your trust in the One who has been all along. Empires come and go. Nations rise and fall. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Put your trust in God! Be saved through His glorious provision. Today is the day to come to JESUS!

Lord, let us not trade our allegiance to You for that which is both temporary and barren. There is no hope in man, nor in anything which man can do. There is only hope in calling out to You and walking in uprightness and holiness as we wait on the good things You alone have promised, and that which You alone can fulfill. Help us to focus on You and not on that which is temporary and will fade away. Amen.

"Here *is* the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. Revelation 17:9

This verse continues the explanation of "the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns" as noted in verse 17:7. The angel has given some detail but proceeds with more. This will continue through the end of the chapter. For now, he says, "Here *is* the mind which has wisdom."

What this means is that something will be stated that requires thought in order to grasp, but it can be grasped. Further, it has to be looked at from a Christ-centered perspective. As it says in the proverb –

> "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom,
> And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding." Proverbs 9:10

Those who are not pursuing a knowledge of the Lord will not even know that what is presented here is a clue to the end times events that are being symbolized. But for those who fear the Lord, pick up His word and study it, those things that are not known to most will be discernible.

In these words, the pattern of the Hebrew aleph-bet matching the corresponding chapter of Revelation continues. The 17th letter of the aleph-bet is *pe*. It is represented by a mouth. Hebrew4Christians says, "Pey follows the letter Ayin, suggesting the priority of the eyes (i.e., understanding, awareness) before verbal expression (negatively, reversing this order results in "blind consumption" or mindless chatter). The *chokhmah* (wise one) is swift to observe and *then* to offer an opinion about something." In this, the letter/chapter connection is seen – an expression of wisdom – "Here is the mind which has wisdom" (v.9).

For now, the angel begins with an explanation of what the mind which has wisdom will be able to discern, saying, "The seven heads are seven mountains."

This is the first enigmatic statement. The seven heads were referred to in verse 17:3 –

> "And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns."

The seven heads only symbolize something else, seven mountains. But this is possibly more complicated than it appears. The reason for this is that mountains in Scripture can refer to governments. This is the case, for example, in Isaiah 2:2 and Jeremiah 51:25 (among many other references). Therefore, this could be seven governments.

However, the mountains could be literal as well. The Greek word translated as "mountain" is *oros*. It signifies either a mountain or a hill. Some translations say, "seven hills." Later in this chapter, it will say, "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (17:18).

Because of this, it may be a literal city that rests on seven hills. Throughout the years, people have attempted to fit Jerusalem into this by choosing seven "hills" and saying that this is the city on seven hills. This is fanciful, but the hills chosen to accommodate this view do not realistically fit. Rather, they are a forced attempt at making the place fit the scenario. Further, this Mystery Babylon is set to be destroyed, once and for all, in the pages ahead. On the other hand, Jerusalem will continue on as the Bible clearly indicates.

On the other hand, Rome has been known as the "city on seven hills" well into antiquity. Rome, or as known by its original name Romulus, was built upon Palatine Hill. The other identifying hills are the Capitoline, Quirinal, Viminal, Esquiline, Caelian, and Aventine. Therefore, this could be referring to Rome.

Another option is that it is referring to both Rome and to seven governments that will join together with a main capitol being Rome. As these things are future, only speculation is possible. Even if the speculation is correct, it can't be certain that it is.

If the mountains are governments or empires, another possibility also arises. There are five major powers that have afflicted or had control of God's people in the past, prior to John's writing of Revelation – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. Rome was in that position when John did his writing and then Rome faded away. However, Rome will again come to be a great power that will afflict Israel (see Daniel 9). And so, it could be both the sixth and seventh empire to wield control over the people and the land.

This would have to assume that Israel is somehow placed under the authority of this entity. If so, this then could answer the previous verse about the beast – it was, and is not, and yet is. It does appear that Rome in particular is the center of the prophecy and because this is speaking of a harlot, there is a religious element to what is being relayed. It is a spiritual prostitution that will find its ultimate fulfillment in a complete rejection of the truth of the gospel.

Life application: In verse 13:18 it said, "Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number *is* 666." Again, in this verse, we are shown that it is possible to discern the things that are presented, but that it takes wisdom. Unfortunately, we don't know if this wisdom will only come about during the Tribulation period or if we are thinking right thoughts about these things now.

In other words, there are patterns which exist right now which could fill the requirements of this verse – some very insightful. However, if the final fulfillment of them is to be found in the Tribulation, then only at that time will the correct interpretation be known. Regardless, the fulfillment can be known and, when it is, there will be no excuse for those during the Tribulation to reject the truth of prophecy.

God has laid out these things in a form of mystery so that those who truly seek Him out, through Jesus Christ, will be able to discern what is going on during the Tribulation. This is true even now. God has revealed the mystery of the gospel through the New Testament epistles. Therefore, the world is without excuse if it does not simply pick up the book and read it. There, we find an explanation of what God has explicitly revealed. There, we find His provision for salvation through the gospel. There, we find JESUS.

Help us, O Lord, to focus our attention on You and not to get too sidetracked by the things which we may not fully understand. In the end, You know what will occur and who will respond to the truths in Your word at just the right moment in their lives. Help us to be a part of that by sharing the truth of the gospel now before the time of trial comes on the world. Amen.

There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, *and* the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. Revelation 17:10

The angel speaking to John just explicitly told him that the seven heads of the beast are seven mountains. Whether those are literal mountains, or whether they are representative of governments was examined. The angel now says, “There are also seven kings.” As such, this leaves several possibilities once again. For now, the angel next says, “Five have fallen.”

The Greek literally reads, “fell.” Vincent’s Word Studies notes, “Constantly used in the Septuagint of the violent fall or overthrow of kings or kingdoms. See Ezekiel 29:5; Ezekiel 30:6; Isaiah 21:9; Jeremiah 50:15; Jeremiah 51:8.” This would align with the idea of empires as noted in the previous verse.

As noted then, there are five of note that have afflicted or had control over Israel in the past, prior to John’s writing of Revelation – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. From there, the angel says, “one is.”

Rome was in that position when John received Revelation, thus making it a sixth empire. Eventually, it faded away. If this is correct, then the five who had fallen are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. The “one that is” would be Rome (the sixth).

At John's time, Rome held authority over Israel. Even the leaders of Israel understood this when they called out –

> "But they cried out, 'Away with *Him,* away with *Him!* Crucify Him!'
> Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?'
> The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!'" John 19:15

Disregarding the ultimate authority of the Lord, the leaders of Israel noted that the control over their nation was securely in the hands of Rome. From there, the angel next says to John, "*and* the other has not yet come."

This coming empire would be the revived Roman Empire. A problem with this is that it would appear to set a different standard of what reference point John is using for verse 17:8 and this verse now – meaning the beginning of the tribulation period (17:8) as opposed to John's present time (17:10). However, it is not an irreconcilable difference because the same empire is being referred to in both cases.

This does fit the scenario quite well, and it appears to match the other confusing verses in this chapter. However, there was more than one king who ruled each of these powers during the time they afflicted Israel. This confuses the scenario a bit, but if only the empire is noted and not the individual kings who ruled them, then it isn't a problem. If this is the correct analysis, the final words are almost self-explanatory. The angel says, "And when he comes, he must continue a short time.

This final empire with a ruler over it, and which will hold some sort of control over Israel, will exist for only a short period. Based on the timing of the tribulation period, this aligns with that notion.

A second option is that if the previous verse refers to "seven hills" rather than "seven mountains," then it is only speaking of Rome and powers which rule from there. This makes the interpretation more difficult to understand at this time, but it will be cleared up as the world moves into the tribulation period. The mind with wisdom will be able to understand who and what is being spoken of.

<u>Life application:</u> It must be remembered that the great harlot rides on this beast. Therefore, there is a religious connection to the beast, even if the beast means world powers or a Roman power. There is spiritual harlotry between the two and both will be judged for their actions. It is hard to be dogmatic about a particular interpretation at this time, but in the end, the mystery of these symbols will become clear.

For now, the main thing to consider is that the events will occur. As this is so, it means that God already knows the end from the beginning. Therefore, we know that the other things that God has said in His word are also true and reliable. He has promised eternal life to those who come to Him through faith in what He has done.

As this is so, let us accept the gospel message. Christ died for our sins, Christ was buried, and Christ rose on the third day. When we believe this message and receive what He did, we are saved – once and for all time. Let us use wisdom. Here is a fuller explanation of what Christ did for you at this LINK.

Let us receive God's precious offer of peace and reconciliation. Let us come to JESUS.

Lord God Almighty, regardless of how the smaller details of future prophecy turn out, we have something far better to focus on! Give us the wisdom to read and understand Your word. Help us to never get distracted from the overall message of the Bible which is that You are God, and You are in complete control of all things. We love and praise You! Amen.

The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. Revelation 17:11

The angel has been describing the seven heads on which the woman sits. In this, he noted that they are seven mountains, but also seven kings. After noting this, he said, "There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, *and* the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time" (17:10). Now, words that – at first – seem most confusing come forth. He says, "The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth."

The gender of the terms is unusual. The words, "and the beast," are neuter. The words, "that was is not, is himself also the eighth," are masculine. The masculine shows that the "eighth" refers to the kings noted in verse 10. Further, there is no article before the word "eighth." Therefore, this is not "an eighth" as if in a series of one after another in relation to the seven kings previously noted. It reads, "he also is eighth."

This probably means that the beast is formed by, and consists of, what has been spoken about concerning the seven kings. To understand, Charles Ellicott goes to one of the parables of Jesus –

"As an illustration, we may recall her whom the seven brothers had as wife; last of all the woman, the eighth, which was of the seven, died also."

The succeeding kings all fell, but there is one left from the beast itself. As it says, “and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.” The Greek uses the word *ek*, out of. The beast is “out of the seven.” Young’s translates the verse more appropriately –

> “and the beast that was, and is not, he also is eighth, and out of the seven he is, and to destruction he doth go away.” YLT

This eighth, out of the seven, is the antichrist or “the son of perdition” noted in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The same word of him used by Paul there is used here, translated as “destruction.” Regardless of the identification of the first seven kings, this “eighth” is certainly referring to him. As was previously seen, one possible explanation of the beast is the progression of empires that have afflicted Israel – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Because Rome faded off the scene but will come back in the future as we know from Daniel 9, this is a total of seven empires. The eighth beast is out of the same entity and specifically the antichrist who rules the final world power.

Life application: The term “perdition” is used of Judas who betrayed Jesus. As noted above, it also is used of the coming antichrist in 2 Thessalonians. The antichrist will be a partner to the false prophet. It is he who is set for destruction because of how he has conducted his life affairs. Like Judas, both led their lives in opposition to the will of God in Christ.

Although the spirit of the antichrist has been active in the world throughout the church age (1 John 2:18), the position will finally be realized in this person who is filled with the power of Satan. He will lead the world into chaos and ruin during the tribulation period, but his end is foretold in Chapter 19. Until that time, the mystery of lawlessness and rebellion against God will only increase as the world turns away from the truth of the message of Jesus Christ in preparation for the arrival of this person.

The times are progressing towards their fulfillment, and as they march on, faithful believers need to stand fast on the gospel message and not waiver in their moral convictions. But more, if you are a faithful believer, you should also be a faithful proclaimer. Those around you are already condemned (John 3:18). What they need is for you to speak. They need to hear about JESUS.

Lord Jesus, You have shown us what is right and good. Help each of us to pass on this wonderful message of peace and reconciliation with God. A day is coming for each of us when we can no longer work, and so before that time arrives, help us to be about Your business. To Your honor and glory, we pray. Amen.

“The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. Revelation 17:12

The mystery of the beast which has seven heads and ten horns continues in this verse. The angel now explicitly states the symbolism of the horns, saying, “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings.” There is no need to go further than this as far as “what” they are, except to say that kings can represent kingdoms. Thus, ten powers led by ten rulers can be implied. Along with this, more can be determined concerning them. The first thing of note is that they are ten kings “who have received no kingdom as yet.”

The ten kings receiving authority will rule together at the same time, not in sequence. Further, at the time of John, they had not received a kingdom. They also are not rightly explained as identifiable kings since the time of John. In other words, this is a future revelation and not something that happened in the past as the preterist belief holds.

The ten kings will arise and will “receive authority.” The source of the authority isn’t stated, but it could be as simple as the alignment of nations, such as the EU today, where a controlling government is formed out of individual nations. This set of ten kings is more than likely a vision complementing that of what Daniel saw –

> “After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It *was* different from all the beasts that *were* before it, and it had ten horns. **8** I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, *were* eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.” Daniel 7:7, 8

This little horn that rises up and replaces three horns is believed to be the antichrist. As this final kingdom will have ten kings, John is told that they receive their authority “for one hour.’

One hour is a metaphor for a short time. This goes right back to the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:10 –

> “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

Various calculations have been made based on the term “one hour.” By taking the time of seven years and determining what one hour is in relation to this, guesses have been made about exactly how long these kings will rule. Such calculations are then turned into speculation about the exact time of the rapture or the exact time of the return of Christ, and so on. This is not responsible theology. The term (as just noted above) simply means “for a short time.” These kings will have a very short rule before their authority ends. And it will be a sad end for them because they rule “as kings with the beast.”

The fate of the beast will not be a happy one, and the fate of those kings who rule will surely not be pleasant.

Life application: There is a period of trial coming upon the whole world, but the faithful believers at the end of the Christian Era will be saved from it at the rapture. Here are a couple The Superior Word videos on the rapture –

The Rapture Timeline - Pre? Mid? Post? It's Right There in the Word:

- YouTube or
- Sermon Audio

The Rapture - Old Testament Types and Shadows

- YouTube or
- Sermon Audio

After the rapture, the world will face these things, including the rise of this beast which is headed by the antichrist and to which these ten leaders are aligned.

It cannot be determined who these kings are because they haven’t yet received their power. They could be a part of the revived Roman Empire, a separate entity within Europe who joins them, an Islamic coalition that joins them, etc. Whoever they are, they will receive authority, but as Jesus says – “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:16).

All the power and prestige that these kings think they have will fade into destruction and hell. Their temporary rule will result in eternal punishment… not a very good deal for them after all. As believers will be taken out at the rapture, thus avoiding the terrors that are coming, wouldn’t you be wise to be a part of that glorious departure? It can happen if you will simply accept God’s offer of peace and reconciliation. Accept the good news today! Call out to JESUS.

Heavenly Father, too often we look at wealth, power, and prestige as if it should be our ultimate goal, and we forget that all these worldly things are passing away. Help us to make right choices that will result in eternal rewards. May we not focus on the short-term worldly gain that has no true importance. Give us right reasoning in these things, O God. Amen.

These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.
Revelation 17:13

The word "these" refers to the ten horns of the previous verse. It is those ten horns who will receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. Of these ten kings, it says, they "are of one mind." The Greek word translated as "mind" signifies intent or purpose. They will have the same goal and will be united in attaining it. Because of this, it next says, "and they will give their power and authority."

The word translated as "power" signifies "ability to perform." As these are kings (leaders of kingdoms, probably meaning modern nations), they will put all of their resources behind meeting their intended goal.

This will include their military, industry, manpower, and so on. One can think of how the allies in WWII united in these aspects to defeat the axis. There was a joining together of the military, industry, and so on, in order to meet their set goal.

The word translated as "authority" signifies "conferred power." It is what gives a nation the right to conduct its affairs which then leads the government to run its various operations. One could think of the constitution which establishes the nation's governmental structure, and then mandates how that governmental structure should operate. This is its authority.

In other words, these ten kings (kingdoms, nations, or whatever) will, for all intents and purposes, align everything that makes them what they are into cooperation with "the beast." One can think of the EU as a precursor to this.

The nations of the EU yielded most of their power and authority to its establishment. That has turned out to be a clumsy, failing system. Without unity of purpose in all ways, it has labored along, breathing heavily but not truly uniting. This will not be the case in the end times. This beast will receive full power and authority from them.

This "beast," as noted here, will probably be led by the antichrist. He will be "the prince who is to come" noted in Daniel 9:26, and he will be of the people who destroyed the

city and the sanctuary of Jerusalem in AD70, meaning Rome. Thus, this beast will most probably be a replacement for the failed EU. Without being dogmatic about this, it is the most likely explanation of what lies ahead.

Life application: As seen in the previous verse commentary, this beast is surely the same as the fourth beast in Daniel 7. In Daniel 7:8, it says, "I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots."

The horns in Revelation are "of one mind." However, three will be uprooted. At that time, they will probably be replaced with the antichrist's own cronies. A solidifying of leadership will take place, and these kings will be united in their wickedness and their intent to usurp God's rule and authority from the earth. However, the antichrist will meet his end in due time.

Until then though, this empire will have the complete support of the leaders and thus of the people. All of its resources, money, and influence will be at the command and use of the leader, and it will be the epitome of what is ungodly and humanistic.

Like so many empires that have been on the earth, this one will probably start out unassuming and beneficent, but it will hide true wickedness and evil intent until it is too late to change course. This is the agenda that Hitler had. He appeared to be the savior of Germany, but he instead brought it to ruin. This is the same tactic being deployed in the United States today. Unless we are watchful and carefully consider our elected officials, we will fall over the precipice which so many nations have gone over.

The times are leading to their fulfillment, and the great empire of wickedness is coming. Thank God that the rapture is anticipated before it arrives. Thank God for our sure hope in deliverance and our gathering together to be with JESUS!

Lord, we as Christians have the hope of a pre-tribulation rapture where we will be in Your wondrous presence instead of left in a world heading towards certain doom. We do pray now that You will continue to turn many hearts to You before the door is closed and it is too late. Thank You for helping us as we spread Your wonderful gospel. Amen.

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful." Revelation 17:14

The beast has been given the power and authority of the ten horns, as noted in the previous verse. With this united power, it now says, “These will make war with the Lamb.” This thought takes the reader back to the Lamb first mentioned in Revelation 5. There, this Lamb “as though it had been slain,” was given the scroll to open. In opening the seals of the scroll judgments came forth. This Lamb (Jesus) is also mentioned several other times as well, usually in relation to matters of the salvation of His people.

This occurs again now. When it says, “These will make war with the Lamb,” it is a reference to those coming against faithful believers, and probably more especially those who call out to Him from Israel. The beast is reflective of those who belong to Satan. As such, the Lamb is reflective of those who belong to the Lord – with the Lord as their Head. As such, it next says, “and the Lamb will overcome them.”

Though by the world’s reckoning, there could be only defeat for the enemies of the beast, with the Lord as the Head of His people, the victory is assured. The beast, comprised of its various horns and heads, will be defeated.

While considering this, it must be remembered that the beast is not just this empire of nations all by itself. The woman is sitting on the beast as is recorded in verse 17:3. Therefore, this war includes a spiritual element as well.

This great harlot is certainly a part of the impetus for their actions – as if they believe they have God on their side because of her. But, in fact, they are working against Him. This beast may have kings that have given it power and authority, but the One they have actually come against is the Lord, and they will be defeated, “for He is Lord of lords and King of kings.

The war now noted in Chapter 17 will be more fully described in Chapter 19 – highlighted by this same title being ascribed to the Lord as He returns on a white horse to execute judgment against this beast who has come against His people who are almost at their breaking point. With no hope left, they will call out, and He will return to save them. But he will not be alone. As we are next told, “and those *who* are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” These words are explained in Revelation 19:14 –

> “And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.”

There is no reason to assume that these verses are speaking of anything other than an actual war. The beast has been described, it has kings that have given their power and authority to it. There is the woman in the wilderness already described. There is the land

of Israel and the coming battle of Armageddon. The various things that have been described, that are being described, and that are yet to be described will all be brought together into a completed narrative as the verses of Revelation continue to unfold.

Life application: In an exciting preview of the events ahead, this verse lets us know that the victory is already assured. War is coming, but it is already noted that the Lamb will overcome.

This world power, led by the antichrist will probably conduct its war in several ways. The first is against anyone who refuses the mark of the beast. They will be cut off from buying and selling, and will surely be hunted down and martyred as well. An attack against the body of believers is an attack against the Lord as we learn in Acts 9:4. Saul was persecuting the church, but Jesus notes that it was actually He who was attacked – "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

The second way war is being waged against the Lamb is literal. He is returning as we will see in the chapters and verses ahead. When he does, the beast will stupidly think that fighting against the Creator is somehow an option… but it's not. Jesus, the Lamb, will overcome them.

It should be noted now that a lamb is a docile animal, not a fighter. The symbolism is clear. Jesus is the Prince of Peace and a loving Lord, but He is also One who cannot tolerate sin and rebellion. For the Lamb to wage war means that God's patience has ended and that there is no remedy at all for those who have come against Him. He is not only the Lamb, but He is also the Lord of lords and King of kings. There is none greater than Him, and He is the ultimate ruler of all that is.

When He returns, it will be to bring peace to the world. But before that happens, there will be a great slaughter. Only then will the world be ready for the peace that has long eluded it. In that coming battle, the saints of the Lord will be participants. This will include all who have died in Christ throughout the ages, along with those who were alive and who were glorified at the rapture.

This will come about after the seven years of tribulation. The beast, which has such great power and authority at his disposal, along with all the power of Satan backing him up, won't stand a chance against the King of Glory. Be on the winning team and be a participant in the greatest battle ever waged.

The Lord is great and greatly to be praised. The book is written, and it reveals what lies ahead. Nothing will change that. And so, call out today. Be reconciled to God. Call out to JESUS!

Lord Jesus, the world is getting increasingly wicked as the days go by. Some wonderful day You will come back for Your saints to take us out of here. At that time, our chance to tell others about you will be over. Help us to have a heart for the lost and to turn many to righteousness before that day happens. Thank You for being patient and giving us the time to bring many to You. Amen.

Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. Revelation 17:15

The angel who has been speaking to John has been describing the beast in verses 17:7-14. He will now refer to something already described by John, but not yet explained, saying, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits." Mentioning these waters now takes the reader back to verse 17:1 –

> "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters."

The great harlot is the woman sitting on the beast that was described by John in verses 17:3-6. This woman, the harlot, is a city (as will be noted in verse 17:18). In the vision, she sits on many waters, and those waters – according to the angel – "are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues."

What this means is that the scope and influence of this religious body (see commentary on verses 17:4-6) which is found in a city reaches out in many directions. The waters are peoples, but there are many, many of them. They also are found in many nations and speaking many tongues.

So, the question is, "Is there such a religious city that has adherents that span the globe?" There might be adherents of it in Guatemala and in China. There might be adherents in Australia and in Canada. It may have adherents in Hawaii and in Malta. It is a harlot (a religion based on works and filled with idolatry) that reaches out in such a manner.

As this woman sits on the beast, and as this is probably a beast that has been around in one form or another for eons (see comments on 17:10), then it means that this

woman's religious expression derives its customs, idols, and traditions from various empires going back to antiquity. The comments in 17:10 noted that one explanation for the beast is that it comprises Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

In other words, if this harlot (this city) rides on a beast where one head symbolizes Egypt, one would expect Egyptian influence or idolatry to be seen in it, perhaps an obelisk. Likewise, religious icons, traditions, or idols from the other beasts would be found in her. Is there such a city on earth today? The answer, of course, is "Yes."

Life application: The harlot is sitting on the beast, and the harlot "sits" on many waters. The harlot is the false religious system that is supported by the beast. It is a system of ungodly government which has great rule and authority. The harlot however is dependent upon something else – people. It is the description that shows the extent of them – "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues."

This concept goes all the way back to the Tower of Babel in chapter 11 of Genesis. At that time, the whole world had one language and one speech, and they attempted to establish themselves as a united power in contradiction to the ordinances of God. At that time, God confused their languages and dispersed them around the world. This has been the state of the world ever since, but now it is getting smaller once again.

There are universal translators on our mobile devices and there is a uniting of the world's religions through institutions like the UN. The inane bumper sticker that is found on the cars of religious pluralists everywhere reads COEXIST – as if all religions are equal in merit, meaning, purpose, and intent. However, the God of the Bible has made exclusive claims which take away the possibility of this being true. Its claims are absolute and unchangeable.

God has revealed Himself in one unique way – through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This concept however is rejected by the beast and the harlot, and they have the support and adulation of the masses. Confusion of thought and morality is again the ruler of the human mind, just as it was at the time of Babel. The words of the Bible ring true –

> "That which has been *is* what will be,
> That which *is* done is what will be done,
> And *there is* nothing new under the sun." Ecclesiastes 1:9.

The repetitious cycle of improper conduct of religious leaders, government officials, and the peoples of the earth will only be brought to an end when Christ sets up His eternal

kingdom. It is a kingdom that will bring God all the everlasting glory He is due. It is a kingdom that is founded on what God has done through the giving of His Son, JESUS.

Lord, since the very beginning You have shown us what is right and the proper path to follow. And yet, time and time again, we have strayed from Your precepts to improper avenues of our own perverse thinking. Help us to think clearly, worship properly, and act responsibly as people. Without Your guidance, we will surely take the wrong path every time. Amen.

And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. Revelation 17:16

The chapter has been speaking of the great harlot, the beast, and the relationship between the two. It seems that there is great harmony and agreement between them. And yet, out of the blue, this verse suddenly reads like part of a tale of intrigue, beginning with, "And the ten horns."

This is the "ten kings" of verse 17:12. It says they will give their power and authority to the beast in verse 17:13. As the woman is sitting on the beast, it seems as if these ten horns (kings) are in agreement with the woman as well as the beast. But it next says, "these will hate the harlot."

Remembering that the harlot is a spiritual entity that prostitutes itself in various ways, and one of those ways is through interaction with the governments around it – just as Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem prostituted themselves – one can see that there is an underlying hatred of the religious body by the secular body. And this is so, even if the religious body is a complete apostate.

An example of this type of enmity (one of several) from the Old Testament is found in Jeremiah 4 –

> "And *when* you *are* plundered,
> What will you do?
> Though you clothe yourself with crimson,
> Though you adorn *yourself* with ornaments of gold,
> Though you enlarge your eyes with paint,
> In vain you will make yourself fair;
> *Your* lovers will despise you;
> They will seek your life." Jeremiah 4:40

Ezekiel 23 details another such judgment, a lengthy one, against Jerusalem. Just because they engage in harlotry with this woman, it does not mean they like her at all. In fact, they despise her. Remembering that the harlot is a city that is committing fornication with them in order to meet a specific agenda, we can look to the world and see a particular city that has done this for eons.

She is in bed with governments around the world, she flaunts herself openly. The nations participate in a bed of idolatry with her, and yet they hate her. Only she has deluded herself that her harlotries mean she is loved. In fact, she is only a whore who is despised because of her actions. Because of her conduct, it next says, "make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire."

In the end, this lavishly adorned harlot will be destroyed by the same nations that she engaged with in her whoredom. It is similar to Jerusalem of the past. The seat of the Lord's religion had so prostituted herself that she was despised, even while she intermingled with her paramours. Such will be the case with this great city as well. Her end will not be pretty.

Life application: An amazing turn of events will take place at some point during the tribulation period. The ten kings of the final world empire will turn on the harlot. The antichrist will come to power and eventually he will become the only source of idol worship left. The false religious system of the harlot will become more and more despised until they decide it is time for her to be destroyed.

This pluralistic system of world religion, which will surely include a supposed "Christian" element, will no longer be tolerated. She has been made wealthy over the centuries and is robed in splendid attire, possessing great wealth. However, she will have failed to stem the tide of destruction upon the world – the very thing which religions are supposed to do.

They are supposed to be the mediators between the people and whatever "god" they serve. But the world will continue to grow more and more unstable despite the kumbaya attitude of complete religious equality. The system will be seen for the failure it is and will finally be marked for destruction.

After taking away her wealth – finery, property, tax-free status, etc. – these kings will completely consume her so that nothing is left of her. The world's false religions will be utterly removed from protection and banned from practice. They couldn't save, and now they won't be saved.

Ironically, by removing the world's religions, there will only be one religion left – the most dubious of all – secular humanism. The world will throw all of its allegiance and idol worship behind the antichrist. "Our gods couldn't save us; we will save ourselves." But this is the path that has been tried and which has failed throughout history. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Such will be the case once again in this final government before the return of Jesus Christ.

A world without true Christianity is a world doomed to failure and destruction. And true Christianity comes through faith, and through faith alone, in what God has done through the giving of His Son. He has done the work, and we are to accept that it is sufficient to carry us through to the good end that is promised by Him. Let us accept the good news and receive God's offer of peace – JESUS.

Heavenly Father, here we are facing every possible challenge to the truth of Your full and complete revelation of Yourself to man – the pages of the Bible that tell us of Jesus. Help each one of us to properly evaluate Your word and then to be able to explain it to religiously confused people – turning them to a saving knowledge of Your truth. Amen.

For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. Revelation 17:17

The Greek has different words in it that are not noticed in this translation. For example, it says "fulfilled" twice, but two different Greek words are used. The first signifies "to accomplish," as if working towards a goal. The second means to "fulfill," as if in having met an end purpose.

Further, the words translated as "purpose" and "mind" are the same. The LSV translates it as "for God gave into their hearts to do His purpose, and to make one purpose, and to give their kingdom to the beast until the sayings of God may be fulfilled,"

Having noted this, the verse begins with, "For God has put it into their hearts." This is a similar thought to that of the strong delusion of 2 Thessalonians 2 –

> "And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, **12** that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12

In such cases, the action is passive. Things are arranged in such a way that the intents and purposes of God are met as people pursue the logical path of that arranged course. One can think of coming to a new land and finding it immensely suitable for farming. We

might say, “God put it into their hearts to farm.” In this, He didn’t actively do it, but things were set in such a way so that they followed the logical path that led to their farming the land.

With this understood, the verse next says, “to fulfill His purpose.” God arranges things so that an exacting outcome will result. There is nothing deceptive or wrong about this. He controls the flow of lava from volcanoes, and He directs the winds in their courses. Meteors come from the sky according to His will. Everything is set in order to bring about an end purpose, thus meeting His will.

On the way, things will be set in place, and the people will have it in their hearts to fulfill His purpose. Even though this sounds directive in nature, the same truth applies to each and every person. Paul writes of being predestined in the book of Romans. God has predestined all things. And yet, he has done it in such a way that we still must exercise our free will in the process.

In the case of these ten kings, it is God’s purpose for them “to be of one mind.” Their one mind (17:13), a united effort of these kings (and thus their individual kingdoms drawn together as one), will make war on the Lamb (17:14). They will also “hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.”

These things were God’s intent in order to arrange the world for Christ’s second coming and for the ensuing millennial reign of Christ. Therefore, all is in a specified order so that they will “give their kingdom to the beast.” Joining in this way, God’s plan will, in fact, come to pass. The all-knowing and infinitely wise Creator is bringing everything to a point that has been predestined by Him, even from the very beginning. And these things will continue on “until the words of God are fulfilled.”

His word is written, and it will come to pass. And yet, during the entire process, the free will of those involved is highlighted. God simply knows the choices that will be made as time and history unfold.

Life application: This verse shows us the omniscience of God in all things, including the wicked choices and actions of man. This in no way implies God actively causes these things. He has given man freewill, and we exercise it to our own benefit or loss. Though He knows our choices before they occur, this in no way negates freewill. We can choose to do evil, we can choose to do right, and we can choose to accept or reject Jesus.

Freewill in man is a principal tenet in the Bible. In the case of this verse, the words indicate that their actions have come about by their willful rejection of Him, not His will

being forced upon them. Their hearts suppress the knowledge of God, and – by default – they move in an expected way because of this rejection. It is a way that came about by free will and yet it was a part of how God has designed them and their circumstances.

Paul gives a general description of this type of action in Romans 1:18-27. In their rejection of God and their consolidation of world power, they have united in their aims and conferred their power upon the beast which is led by the antichrist. And the path they are headed down will lead them to the final point that God knew before He created anything. There is only one possible avenue and one possible termination point, which is the fulfillment of God's word.

It is an amazing thing to ponder, but the important thing to understand is that when these things have come to pass, those who have rejected Him will have no one to blame but themselves. The destruction of the beast is assured; the book is written; and yet it still needs to happen.

Passages such as the one today show us the immense wisdom and foreknowledge of God. And the highest expression of that is in the giving of His Son. Even from the very foundation of the earth, He promised to correct the wrongs that came about through the fall. It is the plan of redemption, and it is this plan that shines forth in the coming of JESUS.

Great are Your workings, O God! How amazing it is to ponder that You know all things before they occur, and yet they still have to come about by our free will choices. It is hard for us to understand, and yet it is an indication of Your great love for us – allowing us to choose Jesus, but knowing the choice we will make. What a great and awesome God You are. Amen.

And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." Revelation 17:18

To complete the contents of the chapter, the angel speaking to John now makes an explicit statement concerning the harlot who rides on top of the beast. She is "that great city." The identity is set and there is no reason to assume that Mystery Babylon, the great harlot, is anything but as is described here. When symbolism is explained by the Bible, that is its interpretation. Nothing more needs to be inserted to bend or twist what has been made evident. Understanding that the woman in the vision represents a city, the angel then says, "which reigns over the kings of the earth."

At John's time, this would be Rome. However, the vision is referring to a future entity. Can this still be said of Rome? The answer is, "Yes." The Vatican (the Holy See) is its own city within Rome. It has all the rights and benefits of being a city-state, and it is considered a permanent observer state of the UN as of 6 April 1964. Thus, it is a part of the body that reigns over the kings of the earth.

Further, this does not say "all the kings of the earth." Thus, it is a general statement. There are, at any given time, leaders of the world who claim to be Roman Catholic. Thus, the influence of the Vatican over them in their political decisions is broad-ranging. And another note is that the word translated as "over" is *epi*. It signifies "on" or "upon," implying something that fits. One can think of the epidermis (skin) fitting on a person.

With this understood, and using that in the translation, it can be rendered, "which reigns upon the kings of the earth." It is not that there is a sovereignty over them, but guiding body upon them. Just as Islam directs the Muslim nations, without being an actual ruler, so the Roman Catholic Church directs these Catholic (and other) nations, directing them without being an actual ruler.

Life application: When the destruction of Mystery Babylon comes, all false religion will be ended, and the true worship of God will be instituted on earth. Babylon the great will be remembered no more. All non-Christian religions will be proven false. The false identification with Christ, by supposed but apostate Christian denominations, will be eradicated. The world will find only a pure and untainted faith in Christ.

Until then we should keep our noses in the Bible, studying it and weeding out any falsity from our doctrine. Let us hold fast to the truths recorded there, and let us glorify God through proper faith in the Lord. He is great. He is worthy. He is JESUS.

It is marvelous to know that someday the world will be unified in worship of You, O God. There will no longer be division and fighting within the church, there will no longer be false teachers to lead Your people astray, and there will no longer be false religions outside the church. We long for the day when our worship of You is perfect and undefiled! Amen.

CHAPTER 18

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. Revelation 18:1

Chapter 17 detailed and explained the vision of the woman sitting on the beast – MYSTERY BABYLON. With the turn of the page, a new vision comes into John's view, saying, "After these things."

Each time one vision ends, another immediately comes into focus as the panorama of history quickly unfolds before his eyes. With the change in scene, John says, "I saw another angel coming down from heaven."

This would be in regard to what was said in Revelation 10:1 –

> "I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow *was* on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire."

That was clearly a vision of the Lord. The Old Testament symbolism from Ezekiel of the Lord, Yehovah, was being brought forth to reveal the glory of the Lord, Jesus. This vision now will be no different. Of him, John next says, "having great authority."

This signifies the moral authority to judge Babylon and to call for its destruction. It is the Lord Jesus who has earned the right to judge the great harlot and to bring it to ruin. Of Him, it then says, "and the earth was illuminated with his glory." This is a reference to the Lord, Yehovah, as was described by the prophet Ezekiel –

> "Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. **2** And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice *was* like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory."
>
> -Ezekiel 43:1, 2

So glorious is this presentation of the Lord that the radiance emitting from Him literally causes everything around Him to be illuminated.

Life application: John's point of reference has changed numerous times during the past 17 chapters of Revelation. He is on earth and then in heaven, then back on earth and

then back in heaven. Things pass in front of his eyes and then new things quickly come into view.

In this new vision, it seems his vantage point is from back on earth because he sees this glorious being coming down from heaven. Scholars argue over whether this is actually Jesus or not. Those that argue against it claim that the vision doesn't match that of other such visions.

That makes no sense. Each vision of Christ is given to reveal another aspect of Him. The vision of the Lamb, by necessity, does not match the vision of the Lion. The thought of Him being the Door will not be the same as when thinking of Him as the Shepherd. We are seeing the glory of God in Christ being revealed according to the aspect of what is being conveyed at any given time. It is no different in this new vision of Chapter 18.

In this presentation of Him, there is a radiance shining forth from His very being. As Daniel says –

> "He reveals deep and secret things;
> He knows what *is* in the darkness,
> And light dwells with Him." Daniel 2:22

And again –

> "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." 1 John 1:5

The glory and radiance of God fills the earth when it is revealed. And it is that Light which came and dwelt among the people of the world to bring them from darkness into this marvelous light once again. In their rejection of Him, only judgment and condemnation can result.

Let us look to God by looking unto the One whom He has appointed to reveal Himself to us. Let us look unto JESUS.

O God, how magnificent You are and how awesome and splendid is the unfolding of Your word. To read of the splendor and power displayed in it is glorious. And to think that someday we will be in Your presence – all because of the work of Jesus! Thank You for this wonderful promise and the hope of glory. Hallelujah and Amen!

And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! Revelation 18:2

Chapter 18 opened with the note of the Angel (certainly a revelation of Jesus Christ) coming down from heaven having great authority and illuminating the earth with His glory. Of Him, it now says, "And he cried mightily with a loud voice."

This is reminiscent of the cry of the Angel in Revelation 10 –

> "He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea
> and *his* left *foot* on the land, **3** and cried with a loud voice, as *when* a lion roars.
> When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices." Revelation 10:2, 3

It is a distinct and assertive cry, "saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.'"

In the Greek, the double repetition is in the emphatic position and reads, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." These words now are the fulfilling of the words that anticipated this event in Chapter 14 –

> "And another angel followed, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city,
> because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her
> fornication.'" Revelation 14:8

Both accounts record substantially the same words, and it is certain that they are referring to the same event. Chapter 14 was spoken in anticipation of what is now recorded here in Chapter 18. This great Babylon is coming to its end, something that was typologically pictured by the fall of ancient Babylon. That was recorded in Isaiah 21–

> "And look, here comes a chariot of men *with* a pair of horsemen!
> Then he answered and said,
> 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen!
> And all the carved images of her gods
> He has broken to the ground.'" Isaiah 21:9

Of Babylon the great, the Angel continues with His words, saying, "and has become a dwelling place of demons."

This is a statement anticipating its final condition. In its falling, there is nothing left to allow human habitation. Thus, the thought is that of a desolate city, forsaken by

humans, that has then been overtaken by haunting spirits. The Lord speaks of such a place in Matthew 12:43 –

> "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none."

Not only is Babylon to be a dwelling place for demons, but it will also be "a prison for every foul spirit."

The word translated as "prison" is *phulaké*. It signifies "a guarding." Thus, this could either be a prison for the foul spirits, or it could be a place guarded by foul spirits. As it has become a dwelling place of demons, it appears that the latter is the intent here, unless the demons are guarding the foul spirits. However, one would think of them as being united in purpose. Finally, the Angel says, "and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!"

The same word just translated as "prison" is again used here and is now translated as "cage." Rather than a prison and a cage, it seems that these should be translated as a "watch," such as in Luke 12:38. In this, it would signify a place devoid of humans and left to only that which is foul and loathsome. That would then conform to the symbolism here which comes from Isaiah 13 –

> "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,
> The beauty of the Chaldeans' pride,
> Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
> **20** It will never be inhabited,
> Nor will it be settled from generation to generation;
> Nor will the Arabian pitch tents there,
> Nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there.
> **21** But wild beasts of the desert will lie there,
> And their houses will be full of owls;
> Ostriches will dwell there,
> And wild goats will caper there.
> **22** The hyenas will howl in their citadels,
> And jackals in their pleasant palaces.
> Her time *is* near to come,
> And her days will not be prolonged." Isaiah 13:19-22

In this 18th Chapter of Revelation, a connection to the 18th letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet is seen. The letter *tsadde* pictures a trail and has the meanings of trail, journey,

chase, and hunt. The letter, however, speaks of righteousness, such as when God is known as *tsaddik v'yashar*, or Righteous and Upright, in Deuteronomy 32:4. The Lord is the righteous Judge, and He will bring an end to Babylon in due time. The word is written, and it shall come to pass.

Life application: The concept of Babylon being a place of spiritual opposition to God goes back to the earliest chapters of the Bible. Throughout the Bible, the two prominent cities of note are Jerusalem – the city which reflects right religion and fellowship with God, and Babylon – the city which reflects defiled religion, uncleanness, and enmity with God.

These two cities aren't just physical locations but are also spoken of as concepts of these things. Whereas Jerusalem will endure forever, as we will see in the coming chapter, Babylon will come to an end. This end will be with great destruction and carnage. Because these two cities are used both literally and symbolically, it is unknown what the destruction coming upon Babylon fully entails.

Will it be a worldwide destruction of all false religions simultaneously, or is it an actual location which, in the end times, is the symbol for all false religion? If the latter, several options have been suggested throughout the years. The first is that it is actually a political, social, and religious center in the location of Babylon in the Mideast – a rebuilt Babylon in the end times.

The second is that the location is Rome where the antichrist, false prophet, and one-world government are centered. And then of course there are those who have suggested New York, Jerusalem, or some other great city as well. What is certain is that Babylon is fallen – even though this is future to us. It is as certain as the ground under our feet. Babylon will be judged.

She is an abomination in the sight of God, and she must be completely removed before the pure and holy religion of the true God can come in its fullness. An end to all false religion will be replaced with worship that is pure and undefiled. In that day, the world will come before the King, God's Messiah, and they will acknowledge that He rules. He is great. He is glorious. He is JESUS!

Lord, You have shown us what is right, what is pure, what is undefiled, and what is good. Help us to think on these things, talk about these things, and hold fast to them. Help us to fix our eyes on Jesus so that nothing impure or defiled enters our sight. Keep us safe from the wickedness of worldly things and from the doctrines of demons. Thank You for watching over us. Amen.

For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury." Revelation 18:3

John just heard the word of the Angel from heaven, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen." The Angel then gave a description of what it had become like, meaning a place of great desolation. Now the reason for this is given, saying, "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

The word translated "For" signifies "because." Also, the first use of "of" is the Greek word *ek*, meaning "out of." Essentially, it says, "Because all the nations have drunk out of the wine." This is now the third time this sentiment is seen in Revelation. The first was in verse 14:8 –

> "And another angel followed, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.'"

Again in 17:2 we read a similar note. We are reminded that "all the nations have drunk" from her cup and thus all nations are guilty of religious harlotry. The cup she holds includes idol worship, the worship of many gods, incorrect and twisted worship of the true God, etc.

Here, the reason why Babylon has become a desolate ruin is given. She had a cup of fornication, and she shared it with the nations. But, as Vincent's Word Studies notes, "The wine of fornication has turned to wrath against herself." Because of her own practices, she is destined to receive wrath for her actions, but what she shared with them will also affect them. In her actions, she does not bring them closer to God, but drives them away from Him.

As has been noted before, "fornication" is used in a spiritual sense here. Just as a person commits fornication with other people outside of a covenant marriage relationship, so people, institutions, and nations commit fornication with a religious expression not in line with the covenant between God and man. He is the Creator and, therefore, we are obligated to seek Him out and honor Him with true worship, adoration, and humility.

The Angel states that these nations had drunk the wine of the wrath of her fornication, but He then specifically says, "the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her." It isn't just that the nations, in general, had been influenced by this harlot, but that the kings of the nations have as well.

She, this harlot, is the one who has been instrumental in seducing them and leading them away from God. And more, the Angel next says, “and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.”

The word translated as “abundance” signifies power. The word translated as “luxury” is found only here in the Bible. It signifies self-indulgent luxury or wantonness. As the entire thought so far perfectly matches the condition of Rome, and specifically the Vatican, it should be considered that the words “become rich” may be taken literally to some extent because the reach of the Roman Catholic Church has enriched innumerable people throughout the years.

However, there is certainly a spiritual element to this as well. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown seems to have rightly stated, “The reference is not to earthly merchandise, but to spiritual wares, indulgences, idolatries, superstitions, worldly compromises, wherewith the harlot, that is, the apostate Church, has made merchandise of men.”

Obviously, this is not limited to the Roman Catholic Church, but it is a defining condition of it. The wantonness, in both physical and spiritual corruption, is on prominent display to anyone who will simply open their eyes and simply look.

Life application: It is true that as society prospers, then those who minister to the society will also prosper. Unfortunately, this prospering leads to indulgence instead of service; it leads to coveting instead of sharing; it leads to idolatry instead of thanks. This is the normal state of religion as it prospers.

In turn, the people see the accumulated wealth and power of these institutions, and they then turn and align themselves with them politically, through business, or even through sexual or physical exploitation of others. This in turn leads to status, position, and luxury for those who enjoin themselves to these apostatizing institutions. Eventually, nothing of true religious expression is left, but only a hunger and a lust for greater and greater increase.

It is a trap in any form, but when connected to religion, it is a corrupting influence even on those who would seek the truth. Precious souls are stolen away from the right mark. Such is the case throughout the religious world of the past and of our present day. In the future, it will lead to God’s final judgment and destruction.

Take heed not to fall into this trap. Instead, look unto the One who is pure and undefiled. Pursue Him and constantly realign your heart and thoughts on Him. Never cease looking unto JESUS.

Heavenly Father, how easy it is for us to be enticed by riches and ease. But you have called us to be servants and to carry our cross – not to lay idle, eating grapes and polishing gold. Help us to act out our faith in right religion and to bring the exalted name of Jesus the honor and glory that He is due. Surely in this You will be glorified. Amen.

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. Revelation 18:4

The mighty angel has spoken concerning the fallen state of Babylon in the previous verses. Now it says, "And I heard another voice from heaven." Because of this, it is generally assumed this is not the same entity (meaning the Lord) as the Angel who has just been speaking. Thus, one or the other cannot be the Lord.

This would be an incorrect assumption. The angel introduced in 18:1 is clearly tied to the Lord of the Old Testament as cited from the passage from Ezekiel. Thus, it is Jesus. However, this is also the Lord Jesus as is evidenced from the next words. He is "saying, 'Come out of her, my people.'"

The voice is clearly the Lord even though it is "another voice from heaven." This can be determined in several ways. First, the word "my" means that the Lord is speaking to His people words of warning and petition. Obviously, this does not mean they are His people yet. But they are people who think they are following Him, but who have been swayed by Mystery Babylon. If they will just come out of her and to Him, they will be His people.

Secondly, if this were a chronological account, they would not be, nor could they be, His people because they would have taken the mark of the beast. That would preclude their salvation. And thirdly, according to verse 18:2, Babylon has fallen. Thus, the words now in 18:4 precede its fall, demonstrating that the words are not chronological.

The Angel of verse 18:1 is the Lord Jesus performing His role as the destroying Angel as is revealed in several Old Testament passages. The voice from heaven in 18:4 is the resurrected Lord Jesus, in heaven at this time, and who is calling out through His word to the people of the world. This will continue through verse 18:8, and then it will return to the thought of Babylon having been destroyed. Thus, verses 18:4-8 are a parenthetical insert into the narrative.

The words of the voice of this verse, and some points in several coming verses, closely reflect the sentiment of Jeremiah 51 –

"Flee from the midst of Babylon,
And every one save his life!
Do not be cut off in her iniquity,
For this *is* the time of the LORD's vengeance;
He shall recompense her.
7 Babylon *was* a golden cup in the LORD's hand,
That made all the earth drunk.
The nations drank her wine;
Therefore the nations are deranged." Jeremiah 51:6, 7

The Lord is calling out to those who are united with "Babylon the great" to come out of her "lest you share in her sins."

This continues to confirm that it is now referring to those of the church age. The petition is made. The word has been given. The Lord is calling out to His people (they are only potentially His people until they actually come to Him) to be spared what is coming. The sins of Babylon the great have been heaping up for eons, and the cup of her iniquity has been filling throughout the entire period. Eventually, judgment will come, and she will be destroyed. Of those who don't come out of her, the verse finishes with, "and lest you receive of her plagues."

The church is not a building. The church is the people of God. Paul shows us this in Philemon –

"To Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer, **2** to the beloved
Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:"
-Philemon 1:1, 2

Likewise, Babylon the great is a body consisting of people. When Babylon the great is judged, she will receive plagues. In this, her people will also receive plagues. It is now, while there is time to flee from this great harlot, that the Lord calls out for His people (those He died for) to come out of her.

Life application: Jesus is calling to those whom He foreknew from the foundation of the world to separate themselves from Babylon the great. God's people are His people regardless of when they live, and He has, throughout every age, sent prophets and wise men to call the world to turn to Him. This is confirmed by Jesus' own words in Luke 11:49-51 –

> "Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and persecute,' **50** that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, **51** from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation."

Yes, from the time of Abel until the closing of the Old Testament period, and then following through to our current time, there has been a call for God's people, by God's messengers, to turn to Him and come out of the world in order to be separate and holy to God. This call is also directed to apostate religions.

As denominations grow old and/or wealthy, they naturally turn inward and away from the gospel. When this happens, the fire of sharing the true message is replaced with complacency and ease. God would have each one of us truly evaluate our place and mode of worship against the only standard by which it can be gauged – the Holy Bible.

If people were simply willing to read, study, and contemplate their Bible, there would be both a great revival in the hearts of the people and a mass exodus from denominations and practices that have fallen away from biblical tenets. But… it is so much easier to sit in a pew once a week and not have to think for oneself. And so, we cool to the things of God, and we sit in ease and luxury. All the while, God is speaking to us – "Come out of her, My people."

The Lord is the Head of the church, and He will purge those parts of His body which are of no value. When He does, the people who comprise those parts will be cast off. And the separation will be self-inflicted. The choice is given to each of us to heed the call and be attentive to His word.

Quoting the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel, Paul writes the following to the Corinthians in hopes of their removing themselves from the corrupting influences of the world and of false religion –

> "Come out from among them
> And be separate, says the Lord.
> Do not touch what is unclean,
> And I will receive you."
> **18** "I will be a Father to you,
> And you shall be My sons and daughters,
> Says the LORD Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18

O weak and faithless soul, are you willing to turn from a congregation you love if it isn't properly handling God's word? Which is more important to you – Christ or your comfortable church home? God will be a Father to you, if you will only heed His ongoing call. The church is not a denomination or a building. The church is the people of God. Being a part of that body comes through faith in Christ alone. It comes through faith in JESUS.

Lord, today – yes, right now – we ask that You show us the error of any incorrect teaching or rite which is being taught or practiced in our churches. Give us the willingness to stand against such things, and to proclaim the truth in hopes of correction, or to walk away from them and leave them to their own devices. May we be responsible and choose Christ over all else. Amen.

For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.
Revelation 18:5

This explains the reason for the words of the previous verse. There, it said, "come out of her my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive her plagues. Why will these things come about? The reason is now stated, "For her sins have reached to heaven."

Here is an allusion to the Tower of Babel from Genesis 11 –

> "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." Genesis 11:4

Babylon the great is a city (Revelation 17:18), its sins have reached to heaven, and instead of being scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth, it has made a name for itself all over the earth (Revelation 18:3).

To further solidify this idea, in some manuscripts the word translated as "have reached" signifies to join closely, glue, unite, and so on. In other words, like the tower that was built with brick and asphalt in Genesis 11, Babylon the great has likewise figuratively fabricated a tower with her sins so that it presses up to heaven itself.

The words here are also reflected in Jeremiah 51. In the previous verse commentary (18:4), Jeremiah 51:6, 7 was cited. Now, the next two verses continue to parallel those words here –

"Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed.
Wail for her!
Take balm for her pain;
Perhaps she may be healed.
9 We would have healed Babylon,
But she is not healed.
Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country;
For her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies."

-Jeremiah 51:8, 9

This symbolism continues with the second clause, saying, "and God has remembered her iniquities." This is a close parallel to what was said earlier in Chapter 16 –

> "And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath." Revelation 16:19

To remember in the Bible does not mean that God forgot. Rather, it is called to the forefront. Babylon has heaped up sins, each and every one of them known to God. When her cup of sin is full, then God's wrath is poured out from His full cup of wrath. The iniquity of Babylon the great eventually will reach that point, and there will be no remedy except complete destruction.

Life application: Ecclesiastes tells us that the things that have been will be again. The repetitious cycle of things shows us that we are unwilling to learn from the past and so God calls it to account in the present. When it says that Babylon's sins have reached to heaven, we see an interesting parallel in the 57th Psalm –

"For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens,
And your truth unto the clouds." Psalm 57:10

Even as our sins rise, heaping up because of their immense number and the graveness of them, God's mercy continues to withhold the coming judgment. However, God's truth is also there, proclaiming that there is a point where His mercy must be mixed with wrath because every sin must be judged. At a point known to God alone, He will remember iniquity that has not been addressed at the cross of Calvary.

However, as God remembers such iniquity, He also remembers those who faithfully follow Him. Some examples of God "remembering" in this way are found when God remembered Noah on the ark – Genesis 8; when He remembered Abraham and saved Lot out of Sodom in Genesis 19; when He remembered Rachel and Hannah and their

barren state in Genesis 30 and 1 Samuel 1; and etc. Again, and again, God "remembers" by acting upon such things, bringing about that which is in line with His nature for the benefit or destruction of His creatures.

God really never forgets, and it is a sad lesson that Babylon the great will eventually discover. For those who are in Christ, there is one thing that God will certainly not remember again. Hebrews 10:17 says of those who come to Him through His Messiah, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." This is the greatness of what God has done for us. Our sins are forgiven. Thank God for JESUS.

Lord God, a time is coming when the world will be judged for its rejection of You. Before that day, help us to be responsible and to get the word of reconciliation out to all people. May we be willing to simply open our mouths and speak. Either heaven or hell awaits all people. With Jesus, heaven is assured. Without Jesus, only hell awaits. Give us wisdom to speak, O God. Amen.

Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. Revelation 18:6

The previous verse noted that the sins of Babylon the great have reached to heaven, and that God has remembered her iniquity. Now it says, "Render to her just as she rendered to you." As a note, some manuscripts leave off the word "you" – "Render to her just as she rendered, and repay..."

Either way, it is not those who were called out of her in verse 18:4, nor is it those who have been martyred by her, that are being called to render retribution. Rather, this is a rhetorical way of highlighting the Lord's right to judge. It is the Lord who renders according to His wisdom –

> "Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people;
> For He will avenge the blood of His servants,
> And render vengeance to His adversaries;
> He will provide atonement for His land *and* His people." Deuteronomy 32:43

The Lord sees the ill-treatment of His people by the wicked, and He will act accordingly to ensure that justice is met. With this understood, it next says, "and repay her double according to her works."

This is the same thought seen in Jeremiah 16 when referring to the Lord's double repayment for the sins of Israel –

"'Behold, I will send for many fishermen,' says the LORD, 'and they shall fish them;
and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every
mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. **17** For My eyes *are* on
all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from
My eyes. **18** And first I will repay double for their iniquity and their sin,
because they have defiled My land; they have filled My inheritance with the
carcasses of their detestable and abominable idols.'" Jeremiah 16:16-18

It is also found in Isaiah 40 when Israel is promised restoration after having received her just due –

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!"
Says your God.
2 "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her,
That her warfare is ended,
That her iniquity is pardoned;
For she has received from the LORD's hand
Double for all her sins." Isaiah 40:1, 2

Unlike Israel who was under covenant with God and thus spared total annihilation, Babylon is not. Israel found restoration, but Babylon will be completely destroyed. The verse ends with the thought of the rendering being exactly as she deserves. God is being rhetorically spoken to, and His punishment upon Babylon is to be such that "in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her."

The cup of her fornication, as was seen in Revelation 14:8 and 17:4, will become the cup of God's vengeance and her punishment. The "double" can mean either twice the quantity brought to bear upon her, or it can mean that the ingredients of the mixture will be double strength. Either way, a double rendering will come upon her for her iniquity.

<u>Life application:</u> To double something is to bestow a right – the firstborn son of a family in Israel received a "double portion." This means that if there were 5 children, the inheritance would be divided into 6 and the firstborn would receive two-sixths, or a "double portion." When Elijah the prophet ascended to heaven, his protégé Elisha asked for and received a "double portion" of the spirit he possessed.

A double portion then can mean blessing and honor in either a physical or spiritual sense, but it can also mean shame and punishment in both senses as well. The great

harlot will face the latter, and her judgment for her treatment of the saints will be severe.

There is nothing good in this harlot, and she has filled her cup to overflowing with the righteous anger and wrath of God. Great and awesome will be her destruction. This is coming because she has rejected the good path that leads to life, and she has pursued only wickedness. Above all, she failed to simply present the gospel to her people in order that they might be saved.

The Lord will judge her. That time is coming. Before it does, be sure to come out from this wicked harlot and be saved through the simple gospel message – Christ died for our sins, Christ was buried, Christ rose again on the third day. Believe this unto salvation. Here is a short description of salvation as the Bible reveals – CLICK HERE

It is the gift of God through the coming of JESUS.

Heavenly Father, we look at the wickedness of the world around us and the false teachers of our religious institutions, and we desire You to remove them. And yet at the same time, it would be far better for them to repent and turn to You. We know all wrongs will be made right so help us to wait on Your time of judgment and work now to turn many to righteousness. Amen.

In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit *as* queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' Revelation 18:7

Instead of exalting the Lord, the pomp and pageantry of this harlot brought honor and accolades to herself. A more fitting description of the Vatican could not be found, but an equally fitting description is next given, saying, "and lived luxuriously."

The word translated as "lived luxuriously" is *stréniaó*. It is a new word in Scripture and will only be seen again in verse 18:9. It is the verb form of the unique word found in verse 18:3 that spoke of wantonness and self-indulgent luxury. The idea is that this city sought its own glory and lived like a pampered queen.

She possessed much wealth and many articles of value, and her beds are certainly soft and comfortable. Again, the word exactingly described the imagery of the Vatican, surrounded by jewels, gold, finery, great wealth, large real estate holdings, and so on. But all of this will come to its end. As it next says, "in the same measure give her torment and sorrow."

As much as she has enriched herself, as much as she has been pampered and glorified, and as much attention has been devoted to her – at the expense of sharing the gospel of Christ – so is this vile harlot to be given torment and sorrow. The blood of the countless martyrs who have fallen because of her will come back and testify against her. The city will be brought to utter desolation.

But even though the book is written, and even though it should be fully understood by her that she is what the ancient prophecies have spoken of, she will sit there, clueless till the end, thinking that she cannot be the target of God's wrath. She is a delusional harlot that cannot see her own sins piled up right in front of her. Instead, she "says in her heart, 'I sit *as* queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.'"

The ideology of the pope today is one of communism mixed with earth worship. He is like the long succession of popes before him. They have each had their own agenda, be it leaning heavily toward the worship of Mary, or be it the conquest of people groups. Their agendas have not been the proper presentation of the word of God or of the gospel of Jesus. And yet, because of her wealth and status, she thinks that she is married to the nations and above any chance of losing her status.

The words here come from the description of Babylon given by Isaiah –

> "Therefore hear this now, *you who are* given to pleasures,
> Who dwell securely,
> Who say in your heart, 'I *am,* and *there is* no one else besides me;
> I shall not sit *as* a widow,
> Nor shall I know the loss of children';
> **9** But these two *things* shall come to you
> In a moment, in one day:
> The loss of children, and widowhood.
> They shall come upon you in their fullness
> Because of the multitude of your sorceries,
> For the great abundance of your enchantments. Isaiah 47:8, 9

What is notable, however, is that this is the same way Jerusalem was described at the time of her destruction –

> "How lonely sits the city
> *That was* full of people!
> *How* like a widow is she,
> Who *was* great among the nations!

The princess among the provinces
Has become a slave!" Lamentations 1:1

Jerusalem thought it would endure, but she had violated the covenant, had brought dishonor to the name of the Lord, and it was ripe for judgment. However, Israel was given a covenant by God. Despite their destruction and exile, they were brought back and reestablished. For this harlot of the end times, such will not be the case. The Lord has made no covenant with Rome, only with the people who are His.

For those who heed the warning of verse 18:4 (Come out of her, my people), the Lord will be their God. For those who remain, only destruction lies ahead.

Life application: The woman riding atop the beast and who sits on many waters is Babylon the great. She is the mother of harlots according to the previous chapter. In Babylon the great, there is a political and a religious connection as was noted. The harlot, who is the religious aspect of the alliance, has "glorified herself and lived luxuriously," and she had done it along with the politicians and rulers.

This religious entity has been so involved in the non-religious aspects of the beast's dealings that she considers herself a queen.

The Vatican became its own nation-state in 1929 and has intermingled its religious influence with the political dealings of nations around the world. It holds great sway and influence through owning immense tracts of land and through the political voice of its adherents.

The pomp and luxurious living of the pope and those in the hierarchy is something that was never intended by Jesus as He hung naked and torn on the cross. The Vatican claims to be the bride of Christ, the King, and supposes therefore that she sits as a queen. And it is obvious that through the great power she exhibits, she feels she will not see sorrow, but rather, will continue on in her regal living forever.

Through this entity, there have arisen many unbiblical and anti-biblical doctrines. Marian worship, the servicing of idols, faith plus deeds (rather than faith alone) being required for salvation, sexual perversion within the priesthood, etc. These are all indications of the apostate nature of the church. Within the church, however, are found faithful followers of Jesus who are working to ensure the truth of the gospel is maintained – lone voices calling out amid the torrent of false teachings and unholy doctrines.

Now stand back and look at other denominations and see that this is not unique to Roman Catholicism. A departing from the truth of the gospel is to be found permeating through almost every major denomination as well as through independent churches. As the end times come closer, there will be a uniting of these organizations through the ecumenical and pluralistic movements until they are united completely as one giant apostate religion.

False Christianity mingled with the other world religions will think that they have attained the royal status of being united as a queen which will never see sorrow. But her luxurious living will have its end, and she will be paid in the same measure with torment and sorrow. What seems like a position of power and royalty will actually be a position of destruction and condemnation. What seems like the throne of permanence will actually be the chair of execution.

The great harlot who uses religion to align herself with the power brokers of the world will meet her end and receive her just due. There is one gospel and one path to restoration with God. Only that which is based on what is stated in God's word is acceptable, and in His word, we find that both are found only in JESUS.

Lord Jesus, You alone are the head of the church and to You alone is our allegiance due. Yes, we participate in our governments as citizens of the nation in which we live, but we are first and foremost Your soldiers in a spiritual war and our highest allegiance is to You. Help us to be aware of the false doctrines in our churches and to work to change them back to right religion which is honoring to You. Amen.

Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong *is* the Lord God who judges her.
Revelation 18:8

Because of the life of luxurious living noted in the previous verses, Babylon the great will be punished. A contrast to the life she has been living will come upon her, as is implied in the words, "Therefore her plagues will come in one day."

There will be complete recompense against her in the form of plagues, and it will come suddenly. While she is sitting fat, dumb, and happy, the life she feels so at ease in will suddenly be snatched away, being replaced with great horror. As it next says, "death."

This is given in contrast to the words, "I sit *as* a queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow." Next, it says, "and mourning."

This is given in contrast to the thought that she had glorified herself. Next, it says, “and famine.”

This is given in contrast to the thought of her having lived luxuriously. A contrasting plague is to be cast upon her for each of her areas of comfort and self-indulgence. The final one is then stated with the words, “And she will be utterly burned with fire.”

This punishment is given for her fornications. It recalls the thought of Leviticus 21:9 –

> “The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire.”

This harlot has brought disgrace upon the name of her heavenly Father by mingling what is sacred with what is profane. Her harlotries have become so great that there is simply no remedy for her actions, and she will be thoroughly punished for them. As it next says, “for strong *is* the Lord God who judges her.”

This is a sentiment found in Jeremiah 50 –

> “Their Redeemer *is* strong;
> The LORD of hosts *is* His name.
> He will thoroughly plead their case,
> That He may give rest to the land,
> And disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.” Jeremiah 50:34

The major theme of the words of this verse are hinted at in the humiliation of Babylon as described by Isaiah –

> “For you have trusted in your wickedness;
> You have said, ‘No one sees me’;
> Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you;
> And you have said in your heart,
> ‘I *am,* and *there is* no one else besides me.’
> **11** Therefore evil shall come upon you;
> You shall not know from where it arises.
> And trouble shall fall upon you;
> You will not be able to put it off.
> And desolation shall come upon you suddenly,
> *Which* you shall not know.” Isaiah 47:10, 11

As for the idea of contrasting punishments for such wickedness, that is seen in Isaiah 3 in regard to the punishments levied upon Judah and Jerusalem –

> [24]"And so it shall be:
> Instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench;
> Instead of a sash, a rope;
> Instead of well-set hair, baldness;
> Instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth;
> And branding instead of beauty.
> **[25]** Your men shall fall by the sword,
> And your mighty in the war.
> **[26]** Her gates shall lament and mourn,
> And she *being* desolate shall sit on the ground." Isaiah 3:24-26

The Lord God determines when judgment will come, how it will be brought about, and the level of punishment that will be brought upon the offender. In the case of Babylon, there will be complete ruin because of the sins she has heaped up throughout the years.

Life application: There is one God and one Lord. There is one and only one avenue to reconciliation with Him, and it is through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Power through whom man is either restored to God or destroyed in His presence. All who align themselves with Babylon the great will find an unhappy ending. So much for religious pluralism!

Either the Bible is true, or it is fairy tales. If it is true, we need to be about the Lord's business. Judgment is coming for those who fail to heed the call. Respond to it today and receive what God offers. Come to the cross and be reconciled to Him through the shed blood of JESUS.

Lord, help us… help us to speak boldly and without fear about the truth of Your word and the wickedness in the world around us. If You are for us, then who can be against us? But in our natural selves, we shy away from conflict and the truth in order to be liked. Lord, remind us that the only one we need to be "liked" by is You. Nothing else will do. Glory to You! Amen.

The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, Revelation 18:9

With the coming destruction of Babylon the great, there will be an accompanying lamentation that fills the earth. As the woman was said to sit on many waters (17:1), her

scope of harlotry went throughout the world (17:15). The lamentation over her begins with “The kings of the earth.”

In verse 17:18, it was explicitly stated that “the woman you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.” With her destroyed, their lamentation will be raised. This is because it is they “who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her.”

The fornication means mixing in idolatrous practices and being turned from proper worship of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The world will follow her in her deception and find out that they had been led astray. This wasn’t only by false religion though, but the words “lived luxuriously” signify they prospered off of being aligned with her.

And how many nations and leaders can this be said of in their intimate connection with Rome? By aligning themselves with the apostate harlot, they have become Speakers of the House, leaders of the Senate, and even Presidents. They have become Prime Ministers, Supreme Court Justices, governors, and so on.

All over the world, being aligned with the Vatican has brought immense prestige, wealth, and power. When she is destroyed, they “will weep and lament for her.”

These people will suddenly realize that they had put their allegiance in the wrong place. They thought they were earning heaven through donations, indulgences, and confessionals. Instead, they are deceived and are set to go off to perdition. There will be utter confusion and great lamentation at how their misplaced source of hope could be brought to nothing. This will all come to pass “when they see the smoke of her burning.”

Imagine the stunned state of Muslims if Mecca was suddenly destroyed! They could not mentally process that their religion was suddenly wiped out, proving it was always a false religion. This is the shock and horror that adherents to the false worship of the Vatican will feel. It will be a double-edged cut – the loss of worldly wealth and power, and the loss of any chance of being allowed into God’s paradise.

The words now closely reflect that which came at the destruction of Tyre, as is recorded in Ezekiel 26 –

> “Then all the princes of the sea will come down from their thrones, lay aside their robes, and take off their embroidered garments; they will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble *every* moment, and be astonished at you.” Ezekiel 26:16

Life application: The thought of this verse closely mirrors the analysis of verse 18:3. The religious institutions of the world increase in wealth along with the prosperity of the people they minister to. As they so increase, it leads to indulgence, coveting, idolatry, and feelings of self-importance.

Follow the upward path of most religions or denominations and this is the normal result. As this occurs, the political and societal leaders align themselves with these apostate religions because it becomes a mutual way of exploiting the people. The religious leaders keep the people in spiritual bondage and the political and business leaders keep the people in line by controlling their pay, benefits, and rights of speech and assembly. They work hand in hand to manipulate the masses and keep the people in line with their will.

However, eventually, rifts do develop, and the leaders of the society often learn to hate the religious leaders and will devour them so that their control is complete over the people. This would be the state found in Revelation 17:16, 17. There, the destruction that comes upon the great harlot is possibly a result of this – the main leaders of the beast fulfilling God's purpose to destroy her. The other kings of the earth who committed fornication with her will weep and lament over her.

There will be immense sadness because of the loss of the riches she possessed, and which also enriched them. They lived luxuriously off of her and that will all be lost. Because she is judged and destroyed, they know their turn cannot be far off. They will see her destruction, and will wail and lament at the suddenness and immensity of it. In this, they will know that they too are mere mortals and possibly next in line for termination.

There is only one true path to what is right and good. God has laid it out for us in the pages of Scripture. He has carefully and meticulously set things out so that we can be reconciled to Him by a mere act of faith. And yet, we as humans will follow almost any path except the right one because we cannot give up on our own pride. Set that aside, admit you are a sinner in need of a Savior, and – by faith – come to the cross. Be reconciled to God through JESUS.

Great are You, O Lord God Almighty, and great are Your judgments. We all deserve destruction and burning, for we are dust and ashes. But You, in Your abundant mercy, have spared the people You love by sending Jesus as our Substitute. Thank You for this Gift of love and this Offering of peace. Help us to share the truth of this great message, O God. Amen.

standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' Revelation 18:10

This verse completes the thought of the previous verse. Taken together, they read, "The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, **10** standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'"

With the context understood, this verse begins with, "standing at a distance for fear of her torment." The context explains the matter. This is speaking of "the kings of the earth." The kings of the earth are spread around the earth. The leader of the Philippines is in the Philippines. The leader of Guatemala will be in Guatemala. And so on.

This is simply a way of expressing the terror of what is beheld. It is also another implicit reference to modern technology where such things can be seen in such a manner. More such references will follow in the verses ahead. When these "kings of the earth" see what happens to Babylon the great, they will recoil in horror, "saying, 'Alas, alas."

It is the Greek word already seen in Revelation, *ouai*. It is an interjection signifying a calling out of "woe" or "alas." In repeating it twice, it intensifies the grief being expressed. And the grief is then stated as being directed towards "that great city Babylon."

This great city that has existed for so long, and that has been the center of supposed worship of the true God for millennia, will fall so quickly and so completely that it will be beyond comprehension.

It would be the same as if Tokyo, Moscow, or Washington D.C. suddenly evaporated in nuclear destruction. Who would ever truly imagine it until it occurred? And in its occurring, a sense of disbelief would still exist in the minds of those who saw it. As a great emphasis, the thought is repeated, saying, "that mighty city!"

Babylon the great is a city as already noted (17:18). The terminology is explicit and is not symbolic. Not only has she been a hub of diplomacy, religious leadership, and trade, but it has endured for such a long time. And more, it has been the seat of so many military and religious leaders that it has seemed that it would never cease to be. And yet, when the suddenness and the greatness of its destruction occurs, they will cry out, "For in one hour your judgment has come."

It seems unlikely that the destruction of Babylon will be anything short of the most significant of natural disasters, or a man-made nuclear explosion. The term “one hour” is given to show the suddenness of the matter. It will not be a long, drawn-out battle. Rather, it will be something that happens so quickly that it will seem over as soon as it begins.

Even if its destruction is due to the onslaught of an invading army, it will be such a quick, complete, and decisive battle that it will seem as if the invaders were simply a flood that overwhelmed in an instant. What is certain is that its destruction will be quick, and its effects will be total.

Life application: The kings of the earth have participated in the prosperity and apostasy of Babylon and have committed fornication with her. They now stand watching as its annihilation comes.

When someone loves another and there is a mutual respect and relationship built on truth and morality, they will do anything to protect them. This is especially true with those we are intimate with. However, when intimacy is found in a relationship of fornication, there is no desire to protect the one they have been with, only a desire for self-preservation.

These kings were certainly intimate with the harlot, having shared in her false religion and in the wealth of her position, but now those intimate relations mean nothing – because they were nothing. Rather, they were only expenditures on a whore.

This is something each person needs to truly think about. Are our religious affiliations truly out of love for the Creator, or are they made to enrich ourselves, satisfy our own needs, and find satisfaction without devotion? Are we willing to help our religious partner, even to the point of death?

In Christ, the answer will always be, “Yes” (see Philippians 1:21). But, for Babylon the great, these kings are regretting the loss of the harlotry and the many perverse pleasures they participated in with her, but they aren’t willing to step forward to help her.

Because the term “mighty” is added into their discourse, it is the sure acknowledgment that the destructing force is even mightier, and it has now shown its power. Therefore, this must logically be divine judgment upon the harlot, even if it is executed by a human agent. As amazing as it seems, the people will know – without a doubt – that this is

judgment from God. The logical connection then is that Babylon the great was, and always has been, a false instrument of religious practice.

There is something actually perverse in our nature which tells us when we are following the wrong path. And yet, we are still impelled on to follow it, nonetheless. It is no different than committing adultery on our spouse or stealing from the grocery store. We know right from wrong, but often act despite this. Proof of the kings' knowledge about Babylon the great is given in their sentiments.

As for you, stop and think through your religious affiliation. Are you in a church that is not following the commands of the Bible? Are there homosexuals in the pulpit or other church offices? Are other types of sexual immorality being overlooked? Is your pastor a male (the Bible is gender-specific) who meets the requirements of the pastoral office as are given in 1 Timothy and in Titus?

If your church isn't following the guidelines of the Bible, then you are participating in willful disobedience of God. Through His word, God calls out to you to "Wake up" and "Come out of her, My people." What is right and proper is to put the Lord before your own desires or allegiances. There is only one proper avenue of faith, and it is revealed in Scripture as it directs us to the obedience of our Lord JESUS.

Heavenly Father, help us to not be disobedient servants, but rather to exalt You and Your word above our personal feelings for those in our churches. Open our eyes to what is authorized by You and then open our hearts to be obedient to that knowledge. We ask this so that You will be glorified by our properly directed faith and practice. Amen.

"And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: Revelation 18:11

With the description of the kings of the earth mourning over Babylon the great, the account goes to a second group of mourners. The verse begins with, "And the merchants of the earth." The word is *emporos*, and it signifies a passenger on a ship, a trader, or a merchant. It is found only in Matthew 13:45 and four times in this chapter of Revelation (3, 11, 15, & 23). Of these people, it says they "will weep and mourn over her."

The translation is correct and fixes the incorrect "shall weep and mourn" of the older KJV. The tense of the verses has gone from the future in verse 9 ("will weep and lament") to the present tense. The tense will change again in verse 17 where aorist

verbs are used. Thus, there is a process occurring that captures the scene – “they will weep and lament,” “they weep and mourn,” “they stood at a distance.”

The first group was the kings of the earth and so this catastrophe is not just in the political realm, but in the economic realm as well. In fact, the details about the merchants and their merchandise will be extremely detailed in the coming verses. They will follow the general theme that is presented in the lamentation over Tyre in Ezekiel 27. For now, it says, “for no one buys their merchandise anymore.”

The word *gomos* is used. It signifies the lading of a ship. It is better translated as “lading,” or “cargo.” The destruction of Babylon the great will bring the world to a financial precipice from which it cannot hide. These merchants will weep and mourn over her because of this. In other words, there is less weeping for the city than there is for their personal catastrophe.

Merchants have always found ways to buy and sell regardless of the economic system which exists. Through capitalism, they openly sell, profit, and grow. Through socialism, they sell what they can legally and pay as little as possible to the corrupt government by selling what they can illegally. Through communism, much is sold on the black market to avoid giving to the government.

No matter what though, the merchants sell. But in the case of the end times, there has already been set up a worldwide system which controls all commerce, and no one can buy or sell unless they have the mark of the beast. In an attempt to control everything and everyone, this system was developed, and the inevitable result is that when it falls, everything else will fall with it. No one will buy merchandise anymore because there is no method of transaction left.

Life application: The state of the world is aligning in the manner described in Revelation. For example, the liberal left in America is doing everything possible to head us into this brave new world. However, what is coming is already destroyed in God’s mind. What they think is liberation from Him and His rule will be the very mode and method of their own destruction.

So much for progressive liberalism leading to socialism, leading to communism, and finally to world control! It is a one-way avenue that has been proven wrong in the pages of the Scripture. Only one form of government will prevail. It will be that of the rule of the coming King, JESUS!

Lord God, we know that the system of this world is coming to an end. The Bible tells us that the things that are happening now will lead to a great system of control over all people, but that it too will come to an end when Christ returns. It would be great if people would just submit to Him now and avoid all of the troubles that are foreseen in Your word. Help us to keep telling others about the good news of Jesus while there is time. Amen.

merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; Revelation 18:12

A description of the cargoes of the merchants of the earth is now provided. As noted in the previous commentary, the listing now is similar to that provided in Ezekiel 27. The list begins by saying, “merchandise of gold and silver.” As in the previous verse, the word “merchandise” is more precisely “lading” or “cargo.” It is that which is stored in a ship for transport.

The precious metals are named first. Gold is the royal metal, and it is a symbol of wealth and purchasing power. In the Bible, it is used as a symbol of royalty and divinity. Silver is more specifically emblematic of currency. In Scripture, it is used as a symbol of redemption because of this.

It next says, “precious stones and pearls.” The word precious is an adjective used to describe the stone. The word “stone” is singular, but it is speaking of any stone. It signifies that of great price, precious, honored, and so forth. Thus, these would be those stones that have value for jewelry and other important uses.

The pearl is something emblematic of extreme value. Jesus equates the precious teachings of the gospel to a pearl. As can be seen, there is a categorical listing that can be followed. The things considered as treasures have been listed. Next, the list turns to soft goods with the words, “fine linen and purple.”

Fine linen is that which is the purest of its kind and which is then used for various purposes. In Revelation, this word is equated to the garments of righteousness (the righteous acts of the saints in Revelation 19:8).

The purple can be a deep purple, deep scarlet (or crimson), and deep blue. It signifies power and/or wealth, even royal status. Proverbs 31:22 links this color with godliness in a woman.

Next, it says, “silk and scarlet.” The word translated as silk, *Ser*, is a tribe of India (or possibly modern China) from whom silk was obtained. This is the only use of the word in Scripture.

The scarlet is a crimson color obtained from the Kermes (coccum), which is the female coccus of the Kermes oak. In the Bible, the scarlet is used at times to indicate substitutionary atonement. From the soft goods, the list next goes to that made of wood and objects obtained from such woody material, beginning with “every kind of citron wood.”

This is a word only found in Scripture. It signifies an aromatic wood of North African origin. Because of its fragrance, it would be highly valuable. The term “every kind” is probably referring to its various uses rather than different kinds of this particular tree. There would be plates, furniture, chests, or whatever – all made with this wood.

Next, it refers to “every kind of object of ivory.” The Greek word, *elephantinos*, found only here, makes it obvious what is being referred to. The tusks of the elephant are highly desired for carving various things, or for being inserted as highlights into furniture and the like. The ivory throne Solomon made is referred to in 2 Chronicles –

> “Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. **18** The throne *had* six steps, with a footstool of gold, *which were* fastened to the throne; there were armrests on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the armrests. **19** Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of the six steps; nothing like *this* had been made for any *other* kingdom.”
>
> -2 Chronicles 9:17-19

The description next turns to objects that are fashioned. It is a general statement, saying, “every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble.”

The same adjective used earlier to describe the “precious stones” is used again here. Whatever wood is highly valued for making articles is what is being referred to. Also, articles of bronze (a symbol of judgment in Scripture), iron (a symbol of unyielding strength), and marble are all mentioned. The word translated as “marble” is found only here in the Bible.

Life application: As noted earlier, the list of goods mentioned here is reminiscent of the list of the wealth of Tyre in Ezekiel 27. She also had large stockpiles of such things amassed, but she was destroyed, and her abundant wealth couldn’t help her. The

destruction of Tyre, and many of the things recorded surrounding that destruction, mirror what is said of Babylon the great.

There is nothing wrong with owning any of the objects mentioned here. Gold and silver are used throughout the Bible as units of currency and for other reasons. They were owned by God's people and used for the building of the tabernacle and the furniture in it. They were also used to make purchases in Jerusalem during feast days.

Likewise, stones and pearls are recorded in the Bible as being possessed by God's people. Linens, of course, were used to adorn the people and also their living quarters. Precious woods and ivory are noted many times. And of course, there are innumerable references to the use of metals such as bronze and iron and also stone for construction.

The problem isn't in owning or using any of these things. The problem is in trusting in them for security or for safety in times of trouble. When the woeful times come, these things lose all of their value. Only a faithful reliance on the Lord can save. Great nations have seen the futility of trusting in amassed wealth. In only minutes, trillions of dollars can vanish.

Unfortunately, seeing the futility in something and learning the necessary lessons are two different things. Unless we repent of our trust in the creation and turn it towards the Creator, we are only increasing our guilt. Let us trust in Christ alone for our ultimate hope. When the world is reaching for gold at the same time as it is perishing, let us reach for eternal life and a return to the paradise God intended for man to reside in. Let us reach out for JESUS.

Heavenly Father, You have given us such a wonderful variety of things to adorn our lives with. And You have given them in just the right measure so that they have varying degrees of value to us and so that we can set up systems of exchange and barter through them. But these are useful only for our earthly lives. Help us to keep their value in proper perspective and to trust only in You for the fulfillment of our eternal needs. Amen.

and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men.
Revelation 18:13

The list of valuable commodities which began in the previous verse now continues here. It should be noted that there are some differences in source texts, so the list – as

evaluated here – may have some variations from the Bible being referred to at any given time.

Understanding this, the list now continues with, “cinnamon and incense.” Cinnamon is both a spice and an aromatic product used in incense. In the Greek of the New Testament, it is found only in this verse. However, it is also found in Exodus 30:23 when used in the holy anointing oil. It is also found in Proverbs 7:17 and the Song of Solomon 4:14. The Hebrew name is *qinnamon*. In Greek, it is *kinamómon*. One can see the similarity between both languages and our modern English.

This is the last of six times that “incense” is found in the New Testament. It is the word *thumiama*. That comes from the root *thuó* which signifies “to kill as a sacrifice on an altar.” Thus, one can see the intimate connection between sacrifices and the offering of incense.

These are next followed by “fragrant oil and frankincense.” The “fragrant oil” is synonymous with perfume. It is understood that these are the luxurious items found in both temple worship and among people all around the world that have disposable income.

“Frankincense” is mentioned next. It was and continues to be an extremely expensive commodity. It was one of the gifts presented to the Lord in Matthew 2:11, and it was also used during the temple times as part of the incense compound presented to the Lord. Chapter 4 of the Song of Solomon contains a similar list of fragrant products in its beautiful verses.

The list continues with “wine and oil.” Again, these were used in the temple in Israel during offerings and were a part of the daily life of the people of Israel. Both have been items indicating luxury and even wealth. They are valuable items in trading.

Next is listed, “fine flour and wheat.” The word translated as “fine flour” is only found here in the New Testament. Both of these were also used in offerings to the Lord and have been staple foods for thousands of years. Following these are listed “cattle and sheep.”

In Israel, both were considered clean animals, and they are both animals that were used in temple sacrifices. They were also commonly eaten by the people of Israel.

Next in the list are “horses and chariots.” Horses and chariots are noted in the Bible as means of transportation, warfare, and trading. The word translated as “chariots” is

rhedé. It is only found here in the New Testament. It is a Latin word, but it is of Gallic origin. It signifies a chariot of four wheels.

Finally, the list ends with "the bodies and souls of men." The meaning appears obvious. It signifies humans that are traded for-profit and for use. Hence, slavery is the intended meaning. It is something that has existed, and it continues to exist in various forms to this day.

Life application: It should be noted that owning slaves was allowed under the law, and it was commonly practiced throughout ancient times. The biblical rule for slaves was of care and not abuse. However, the master of the slave was given more authority over his slaves than other people because they were his property. The issue of slavery is a part of the human story, and it has always been a reality.

Babylon the great has had great wealth in many forms as has been seen in the past two verses. However, despite its immense wealth, power, and status, it has come to ruin.

When we put our hopes and trust in the creation rather than the Creator, the inevitable result will be mourning, sadness, and loss. And so, let us look to the eternal. Let us allow the words of Scripture to fill our minds, and let us anticipate all goodness in a world that is prepared for us by a loving Creator. He is coming to gather us to Himself. He is JESUS.

To You alone, O God, is our allegiance due. You have given us a world of variety and wonder, and You have given us beautiful things to bring joy to our hearts, but we need to remember that they are a part of what You have created and are not things we are to idolize. Rather, we are to give thanks to You for them. Help us to remember this and to worship and praise You alone. Amen.

The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all.
Revelation 18:14

The mournful words concerning the destruction of Babylon the great continue here, saying, "The fruit that your soul longed for." Here is a word found only in this one instance in the Bible, *opóra*, fruit. It signifies ripe fruit, coming from words that indicate "the end of the summer." Albert Barnes says it "means, 'late summer; dog-days,' the time when Sirius, or the Dog-star, is predominant. In the East this is the season when the fruits ripen, and hence the word comes to denote fruit. The reference is to any kind of fruit that would be brought for traffic into a great city, and that would be regarded as an article of luxury."

Of these things, it says this fruit "has gone from you." Babylon is destroyed, and so these things will never be brought into her again. The cargo carriers with their precious ladings will be taken elsewhere, but they will not enter her anymore. The thought is then further expanded upon by saying, "and all the things which are rich and splendid."

Again, another unique word is found here, *liparos*. It comes from the word meaning "grease" or "fat," and thus it signifies rich and sumptuous. The next word of note is from the Greek *lampros*. It signifies bright, shining, splendid, or magnificent. One can see the connection to our word "lamp." It is used several times in the New Testament to indicate rich, luxurious clothing.

The two words together may indicate soft, comfortable gilded furniture, or something like that. Such things as this, it is said, "have gone from you." It is the same thought just stated, highlighting the notion of complete desolation. Nothing of value, pomp, or finery is to be seen. And more, the verse finishes with, "and you shall find them no more at all."

The utterly complete destruction of Babylon the great is highlighted with this. Not only have all of these things been destroyed out of her, and not only will shipping into her cease, but it will be so forever. She has found her ruin, and she will remain a ruin from this point on.

Life application: The works of the flesh that Babylon the great sought after were like those explained by Paul in Galatians 5 –

> "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, **20** idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, **21** envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Galatians 5:19-21

These are the works of wickedness which have been the main diet of those in Babylon since the beginning. What they should have focused on is a right walk with the Lord. In this, they would have reaped of the fruit of the Spirit. This is explained by Paul in the next verses of Galatians 5:22-24

> "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. **24** And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

The unbridled lusts and passions of the people participating in Babylon's wealth have caused them to squander their existence. The choice foods, the expensive clothes, the high living... they are all gone, never to return.

The halls of Babylon will be desolate, and her riches will be turned to rubble, but Jerusalem shall be a praise in all the earth and the glory of the Lord will radiate from Zion. Babylon the great will not even come to remembrance when the Lord is exalted throughout the world. Man's ways are fallen and will always lead to condemnation. But the Lord's ways are right and in pursuing them, man finds salvation. The Door is open, and the path to glory is set. Let us come to God in the manner He has laid out for us. Let us come to Him through JESUS.

Heavenly Father, we long for the day when Christ our Lord will sit on the throne of His glory in Jerusalem and rule the nations! We long for the day when the wickedness of Babylon isn't just gone from the world but gone from the memory of the people as well. Help us today to live in the Spirit and produce fruit acceptable and pleasing to You! Amen.

The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, Revelation 18:15

Verse 11 said, "And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore." That was followed by three verses describing the things these merchants traded. Now, after that extended description of their goods, it again refers to the merchants themselves, saying, "The merchants of these things."

It is referring to all the goods listed in the previous verses that they had sold in supplying the city. So great was their trade that it notes of them, "who became rich by her." If a person has a product that costs him $5.00 and he sells it for $5.00, he cannot get rich. However, these merchants became rich through Babylon the great.

Thus, it speaks of wealth and luxury by purchasing things at a rate that enriched those who sold their goods. It was obviously a good deal for them, but that has come to an end. As it says, they "will stand at a distance for fear of her torment."

It is the same as the kings of the earth. In verse 18:10, it said that they were "standing at a distance for fear of her torment." The difference is that the verb there is a perfect participle, but here it is in the future tense. It makes the scene alive and active as the tenses change. These merchants "will stand" at a distance. It is coming, and when that time comes, they will be "weeping and wailing."

For consistency, the Greek words, like in verse 18:11, should be translated as "weeping and mourning." The destruction of Babylon will affect the state of things for these people. While heaven rejoices over her, they will weep and mourn.

Life application: These merchants were enriched by the great city, but their weeping and mourning will not be as one would mourn over a family member. Instead, they will mourn over their own loss.

All of their merchandise has been listed. It is very expensive stuff which they are invested in. However, they will now be unable to profit from its sale. But as the Bible shows elsewhere, even the greatest riches have no true value when society crumbles –

> "How the gold has become dim!
> *How* changed the fine gold!
> The stones of the sanctuary are scattered
> At the head of every street.
> **2** The precious sons of Zion,
> Valuable as fine gold,
> How they are regarded as clay pots,
> The work of the hands of the potter!" Lamentations 4:1, 2

We tend to look at the things around us and revel in them. Sometimes, we put our hope and trust in stuff that can be stolen from us, lost in a cataclysm, destroyed in an accident, or whatever. There is nothing that is enduring. And those things that may seem of great value can suddenly lose their value with the next technological advance, or with the next financial collapse.

Everything is temporary and fleeting except the Lord. If our trust is placed in Him, we will not face the sadness of the world. Instead, we will have a hope that transcends this earthly life. Let us seek His face and hope in Him. Let us look unto JESUS.

Lord God, please help each one of us to keep our eyes properly directed toward You. Help us to understand that stocks, IRAs, money markets, and even amassed accounts of precious metals cannot save. Instead, they only provide false security in this world. Give us the wisdom to trust in You alone and to direct the attention of those around us to You as well. Amen.

and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! Revelation 18:16

In verse 18:10, the kings of the earth were “standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon...” Now almost the same words are again said by the merchants of the earth. Beginning in the previous verse, it says that the merchants of the earth “will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, **16** and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city...’”

Like the kings of the earth, these merchants will mourn over Babylon the great. However, the kings called out an exclamation that was fitting of the office of a king, meaning judgment. They exclaimed, “For in one hour your judgment has come.” On the other hand, the merchants call out an exclamation that is fitting of their trade, noting its finery. They begin this by saying, “that great city that was clothed in fine linen.”

This was one of their cargoes as noted in 18:12. They mourn over the city as if she were a woman dressed in the linen which they had adorned her with through their sales. As noted, fine linen is used elsewhere in the Bible to indicate righteousness. For Babylon the great, it is only self-righteousness.

Along with that, they note, “purple.” As seen in 18:12, purple signifies power and/or wealth, even royal status. Proverbs 31:22 links this color with godliness in a woman. For Babylon the great, these were only earthly in nature, but they failed to reflect the true inner self.

The merchants next call out, “and scarlet.” As seen in 18:12, the color is used elsewhere to signify substitutionary atonement. However, Babylon the great failed to receive this, and the scarlet (red) will speak of the judgment of her own sins.

It next says, “and adorned with gold.” Verse 18:12 explained that gold is the royal metal. It is a symbol of wealth and purchasing power. But for Babylon the great, she will find that she cannot buy her way out of her sentence of judgment. Her royal states will be stripped from her, and she will be left abandoned.

The verse next says, “and precious stones.” The Greek is singular, “stone.” The jewel-encrusted items found in Babylon the great will have no value when her judgment comes. Men in her will reach out for them as if they can save, and they will die with these clasped in their hands.

Finally, the verse ends with, “and pearls!” As seen in 18:12, Jesus equates the precious teachings of the gospel to the pearl. For Babylon the great, there is only a false gospel, which is no gospel at all. The pearls of Babylon the great will perish with her. Like what happened to the fine things of Jerusalem when it was destroyed by Babylon, so will

happen to the fine things of Babylon the great. This will come when it is judged by the Lord –

> ‘How the gold has become dim!
> *How* changed the fine gold!
> The stones of the sanctuary are scattered
> At the head of every street.” Lamentations 4:1

Life application: The things of this world are all destined to pass away, but the beauty of the soul who loves and follows God is everlasting. Here is what Peter admonishes the women of God in order for them to have an everlasting remembrance –

> “Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel— **4** rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” 1 Peter 3:3, 4

God looks for the “hidden person of the heart” and the “incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit,” not a woman as shallow as a saucer who is only externally beautiful. Again, Paul addresses the same concept in his first letter to Timothy –

> “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; **9** in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, **10** but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.” 1 Timothy 2:8-10

Some of the very things these apostles warned about are the things for which those in Babylon the great are noted for having been adorned with. If we look to Hollywood actresses or the wives of politicians, we generally see people that are beautiful, shallow, and have low morals. They are fawned over because of their physical beauty, but that will fade quickly as the years pass.

Babylon the great has all the outward appeal of false religion and spiritual enlightenment, but it has no substance. Only when faith is built upon the truth of God in Christ, is there anything of lasting value. Come to the firm Foundation, come to the Rock, come to JESUS!

Here we are Lord, Your creatures. But we reject You, and we go after every false spiritual teaching we can find. It is so much easier to listen to easy messages of false

enlightenment than it is to pick up our Bible. How pleasing it is to listen to a sermon-lite by a fancy prosperity preacher than it is to read the Bible and be made aware of our sinful state and our need for Your redemption. Help us to just get it right. Help us to follow Jesus. Amen.

For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance Revelation 18:17

The words now continue the cry of woe called out by the merchants. That continued cry says, "For in one hour."

This phrase, like verses 17:12 and 18:10, is an idiom meaning, "In a very short time." It does not necessarily signify the sixty minutes on a clock. We might say, "I'll be there in ten seconds," meaning "in a jiffy." These are expressions signifying shortness of time. This is certain because the term "in one day" is spoken of concerning the same event in verse 18:8. For Babylon the great, in this very short amount of time, "such great riches came to nothing."

One can see the utter destruction of the city. It gives the hint of being completely overrun by the enemy, a great natural disaster, or even a nuclear blast. Whatever will come upon her, it will be sudden and cataclysmic. This will be so much the case that it next refers to, "Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea."

The "kings of the earth" were mentioned in verse 18:9. The "merchants of the earth" were mentioned in verse 18:11. Now it is those who are on the sea, where each class is named. The "shipmaster" is a designation found only in Acts 27:11 and here. It signifies a steersman or a pilot. Those "who travel by ship" are passengers. The "sailors" are those who work as seamen on ships. The word is found twice in Acts and then again here. And finally, "as many as trade on the sea" refers to those who get their livelihood by the sea, such as dockworkers and so on.

The terminology here is a broad brushstroke of the state of the world at the destruction of Babylon, and – like the two other categories, meaning the kings and the merchants – it seems to presuppose television. The words here do not mean that Babylon the great is a port city. Rather, just as the "kings of the earth" reflect any king in any given kingdom – even one on the other side of the world – so those who trade or travel by sea could be anywhere in the world and watch the complete destruction of the city.

The event will be seen globally. Hence the final words of the verse, these people "stood at a distance." It is the same basic words used in verses 18:10 and 18:15. It signifies that they have seen the event but have no power to intervene in what occurs. Again, if the words are to be taken as a true depiction of what occurs, television and/or the internet is presupposed.

Life application: This great city was functioning normally when sudden and cataclysmic upheaval ended it and brought it to nothing. Such is the futility of having one's hopes in any physical commodity.

People who store up gold in hopes of being secure during an economic collapse are also setting themselves up for an added dose of sadness when the gold doesn't help. This isn't to say that saving for the future is unwise, but when one's trust is in such savings, it is sure to disappoint at the time it is expected to provide the intended security.

This is the lesson that we fail to learn in generation after generation, and it will again be noted by those who watch the fall of Babylon the great. The world's hope of complete security and stability will be dashed. Those who stand at a distance will realize this.

With the end of this wicked city will also be the end of their means of prosperity. There is only one place where hope meets up with surety. That is found in God. And as God has revealed Himself in and through His Son, we can have the absolute surety of His word will come true. What can man do to us? What can separate us from the love of God in Christ? In Him, we are safe, and in Him, we are secure. He is our Keeper. He is JESUS.

Lord Jesus, only in You will we ever have true riches. Help us to realize this and to never put our trust or hopes in anything which is a part of the creation. Instead, help us to keep our thoughts, hopes, and desires in You alone. Because You are the Source of all things, then in You is found true and complete satisfaction – even throughout all eternity! Amen.

and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?' Revelation 18:18

The shipmasters, sea travelers, sailors, and sea traders all cry out now, just as it is said that the kings of the earth and the merchants of the earth have cried out – mourning over the destruction of Babylon the great. As it says, "and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning."

As noted, this will be an event seen around the world. This is certain because of the various categories of people that are said to lament over her as they witness her destruction. For all of them to see this, it means that they must have the ability to do so via TV/internet. This is unlike Tyre of Ezekiel's prophecy that speaks in similar terms concerning her destruction, but nothing is said of these people being personal eyewitnesses of the events.

But with the coming of modern technology, the prophesied destruction of Rome will be – like the coming of the two witnesses to testify – a worldwide event. Of these people, and when they see her burning, they will say, "What is like this great city?" The words are reflective of the question concerning Tyre from Ezekiel –

> "In their wailing for you
> They will take up a lamentation,
> And lament for you:
> 'What *city is* like Tyre,
> Destroyed in the midst of the sea?'" Ezekiel 27:32

Rome has been around for millennia. It has been the center of the world at times. The old saying, "all roads lead to Rome," is based on that fact. It is an international hub of trade, and its wares include the apostate trade in Roman Catholicism. Babylon the great will be judged, and it will bring Rome to utter destruction.

Life application: The people of the world will look at the vast devastation of Babylon the great and cry out in horror. In other words, if this devastation can come upon her, then what hope is there at all? It is the feeling many Americans had in 2001 as they saw the twin towers fall.

There is an ocean that separates America from her enemies. There is the greatest military on earth to protect her from them. There is wealth and power, ease, and security… and yet sudden destruction came upon the very symbols of her power and wealth. And this was merely a few buildings, not an entire city and system. As incomprehensible as was the destruction on 9/11, it will be minuscule in comparison to the fall of Babylon the great.

In a similar cry of perceived power, we saw in Revelation 13:4 this question asked by the people of the earth, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" Suddenly, their marvel at the power of the great beast is turned into cries of "Alas!" What was thought incomparable has been leveled by something far greater. The

question the people should have asked when all this started is the question asked by Moses and the children of Israel at the Exodus –

> "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods?
> Who is like You, glorious in holiness,
> Fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Exodus 15:11

You see, there is only one God and there is only one ultimate power. Anything else is a part of what He has created. No matter how splendid, powerful, rich, or terrible, it is only a part of the creation, and it is therefore subject to His awesome hand of direction and judgment. Thus is the fall of Babylon in the eyes of those who look upon her in horror and dread.

For true safety and security that transcends this temporary and perishing world, look to what God offers. He promises eternal security and eternal life for all who come to Him through JESUS.

Yes Lord! There is none like You. You are above all the "gods" for they are not gods at all, but the deceptive lies of our imaginations and the boastings of those who do not perceive the truth. Help us, O God, to rightly look to You alone and to proclaim Your glory to those around us. Praises belong to You, O God. Amen.

"They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.' Revelation 18:19

John continues with the words concerning those who mourn over the destruction of Babylon the great, saying, "They threw dust on their heads." The word "They" is referring to "Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea," as is found in verse 18:17.

The idea of throwing dust on one's head signifies great mourning and lamentation. In Joshua 7, after being defeated by an army of insignificant size, Joshua and Israel's elders mourned at the loss –

> "Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads." Joshua 7:6

This type of mourning is recorded elsewhere in Scripture such as in the comparable verses about Tyre in Ezekiel 27:30. It is an outward display that is not without meaning. The idea goes back to the very creation of man where the Bible says in Genesis 2:7, "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

The idea conveyed is that the distress or sadness is so great that returning to the dust would be preferable to what is being felt. All one can think of, in such a state of distress, is about the time when he didn't exist. He mourns as if he could return to that state. In this terrible mourning, it next says, "and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying 'Alas, alas, that great city.'"

This is the same terminology, found in verses 15 and 16 of this chapter, that was uttered by the merchants of the earth. Just as the merchants were distressed over the loss of revenue in the selling of their goods, so these people are equally affected in the same manner and for the same reason. As it next says, "in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth!"

To them, there is personal loss over the city's destruction. They had financially benefited from trade in her, and that has ended. The goods they send upon the seas will arrive at a port, and when they do, there will be no trucks heading in that direction any longer. There was once bustling trade coming in and going out of her, but that has ceased forever. Babylon the great has fallen, "For in one hour she is made desolate."

This is similar in thought to verse 17, which said, "For in one hour such great riches came to nothing." The world's system of trade and commerce has been violently upheaved at the destruction of this great harlot, and the people who are a part of it will mourn greatly at the loss they have suffered.

Life application: In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon says – "If a man begets a hundred *children* and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say *that* a stillborn child *is* better than he" (Ecclesiastes 6:3).

This reflects the state of those who see the destruction of Babylon. They cry out, they weep, and they wail at the loss. But it is a sadness that is actually directed inward, at their personal loss. The city's fall means that they will no longer be able to conduct trade and commerce. Their sadness has less to do with the city or the people than it does for their own sad situation.

The shock of this enormous empire falling in such a short time has them beside themselves with grief. But this is exactly what Jesus warned about when speaking to Israel in Matthew 6:19-21 –

> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The love of money and the things of the world will only bring sadness in the end. It has caused once-wealthy businessmen to dive out of high rises, sports figures to point a gun back at themselves, and lovers to devise ways of disposing of each other in hopes of obtaining what they desire. When our eyes, affections, and lusts look to the creation for satisfaction, they will only consume us in misery. But when we direct our eyes to the Creator, we will find the Source of every good blessing we could ever desire.

This is one main premise of the Bible that goes from its very first pages to its very last. Only in the Creator is found true joy and contentment. In order to help us more fully understand this, He sent Christ into the world to lead us back to Himself. It is through Him alone that this state of peace and everlasting joy can be found. Redirect your eyes away from this world and to the Christ of God, our Lord JESUS.

O God, forgive us for placing idols in our hearts and before our eyes. Help us always to direct our attention and affections to You alone, and help us to be strong in the conviction that only You can truly satisfy our deepest needs and desires. Thank You, O God, for looking out for us and filling us with blessings from Your open hand of grace. Amen.

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!" Revelation 18:20

With the desolation of Babylon the great complete, words of victory over her come forth, saying, "Rejoice over her, O heaven."

The meaning is that heaven itself will rejoice over the fall of this city. Thus, there is a stark contrast between the worldly reaction over her to that of the heavenly one. The kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth, and those engaged in sea trade all mourn and lament over her. They had become enriched through their dealings with her, and all they could feel was the sadness of the loss that accompanied her fall because of it.

Heaven, however, is filled with the saints of the ages who had been persecuted and martyred by her. And more, her message has been contrary to the gospel itself, relying on works in order to be saved. But the gospel is of faith and not of works. Therefore, this enemy of the pure gospel is destroyed, and heaven will rejoice over that.

And more, it next says, "and you holy apostles and prophets." Here, some manuscripts state "and the saints, and the apostles, and the prophets." The difference in the Greek means either an accidental insertion or an accidental drop of a couple words probably occurred. Either way, by naming the various categories, it is a way of saying that not only will there be a general rejoicing in heaven over her, but that each category will find itself vindicated over her.

Rome's authority killed prophets, such as John the Baptist. Rome's authority martyred apostles. And Rome martyred innumerable saints over the centuries as well. The mixing of Christianity with the authority of Rome did not end the persecution, it just made it state-sanctioned persecution of those who rejected Rome's view of the presentation of the faith. But all of that has come to an end. As the verse says, "for God has avenged you on her!"

The Greek could have several meanings. It literally reads, "for God has judged your judgment on (or out of) her. This could mean the judgment that she is due for the treatment of you. It could mean the judgment which is your due. It could mean the judgment that she has judged concerning you. Or, it could even mean God has taken your cause out of her authority and assumed it as his own.

Whichever is the case, God is the one to ultimately decide. As these words follow after the thought of heaven and its occupants rejoicing over her, it certainly involves the idea that her destruction is fully in accord with the plans and purposes of God, and that His plans and purposes have remembered all of His faithful who were harmed by her.

Life application: Quoting Deuteronomy 32:35, Paul says in Romans 12:19, "'Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." After saying this, he then quotes Proverbs 25:21–

> "Therefore,
> 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
> If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
> For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.'"

This is the calling of the believer because God would rather have a lost soul turn to Him than for him to continue on in his wayward life and be eternally separated from Him.

Once a believer is saved, nothing can separate him from an eternity in God's presence. Therefore, we are to consider our own lives as less important than others and be willing to expend ourselves even for our enemies.

At the same time though, there is the human weakness of wanting immediate justice for offenses against us. God asks us to put those on hold because all wrongs will be righted, and all offenses will be repaid. Babylon the great, the one who has oppressed God's people all along, will receive her punishment in full.

At that time, the heavens, the apostles, and the prophets will rejoice because of what will come upon her. The vengeance we are now asked to restrain ourselves from will be realized. God will personally ensure that the destruction this great harlot is set for will come about. All wrongs will be avenged, and all offenses will be repaid.

Until that day, it is our job to share the gospel. As hard as it is to share it with some people, this is what we should always strive to do. Our Lord hung on a cross for man's reconciliation to God. Therefore, let us speak about this great deed. Let us tell the world about JESUS!

Lord God Almighty, when we face hardships, slanders, and personal offense by those who are enemies of Your truth, it sure is hard to not take revenge on them. In our natural selves, it is just not normal to turn around and offer them a blessing. So, Lord, please stir up our spirits to do as You have asked and give us the strength to follow through with it. Thank You and amen.

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw *it* into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. Revelation 18:21

With the description of the mourning of those on the earth and the rejoicing of those in heaven complete, a description of what the words "one hour" noted in verses 18:10, 18:17, and 18:19 is now given. That term was repeated to show that the destruction of Babylon would be quick. Now, showing how violently it will occur, and beginning with, "Then a mighty angel."

The Greek reads, "one mighty angel." Because of the wording, it is may not the same as the one mentioned in verse 18:1. Words comparable to Revelation 18:21-24 are found in Jeremiah 25:8-11, and those words are spoken by the Lord. Therefore, this is at least an angel appointed by the Lord for this particular time, or it could be another revelation of Christ Himself.

Either way, it says this angel "took up a stone like a great millstone." A stone like a millstone signifies one round and very heavy. They were about two feet in diameter and about twelve inches thick. There were two of them. The bottom would not move. The top one would be turned by a handle or crank affixed to it. Two people would sit opposite one another. The first took the handle and turned it halfway. Then the other person would grab it and turn it the other half of the way.

The meaning of "like a millstone" can only be speculated on, but being round, it could signify an asteroid or a nuclear weapon. Whatever it is, it will be something that will catastrophically wipe out the entire city. The words next say, "and threw *it* into the sea." This would be for effect. Throwing a heavy, circular-shaped stone into the sea would cause the water to splash up in all directions, just as the land would be heaved up in all directions when a large asteroid or nuke lands on it.

With this demonstration of destruction, the angel is "saying, 'Thus with violence.'" In this, a word found only here in Scripture is used, *horméma*. It signifies "a rushing on," or "impulse." There will be a great and sudden impulse that overflows the city. It is possible that it is an advancing army, but they would have to come through exceedingly quickly and with extreme violence. Whatever is the cause of the ruin, the final words of the verse explain the complete nature of her destruction, saying, "the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore."

Babylon will come to a complete and permanent end. The words of this verse were prophetically anticipated through the words of Jeremiah –

> "Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, *that* you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. **64** Then you shall say, 'Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary.'" Jeremiah 51:63, 64

What happened to ancient Babylon was a type of what is coming upon Babylon the great. Whether this is Rome or not, but which seems exceedingly likely, this great city will be completely wiped out. There will be absolute ruin of it, and it will remain desolate as a witness to her complete apostasy for all ages.

Life application: In Daniel 2, we read the account of a dream the king of Babylon had concerning a giant statue made of different materials. Here is a portion of that–

> "This great image, whose splendor *was* excellent, stood before you; and its form *was* awesome. **32** This image's head *was* of fine gold, its chest and arms of

> silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, [33] its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. [34] You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. [35] Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." Daniel 2:31-35

Daniel went on to explain that this statue represented a series of world empires – Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Each of these was directly involved in the affairs of the Jewish people and controlled the land of Israel. Yes, other world powers have come and gone, but it is these that are the focus of the prophetic events.

Understanding the symbolism of this vision, and others in Daniel, it appears to confirm that the Rome which was will also be again. In other words, the Roman Empire is being reconstructed in the end times and will have a major bearing on the nation of Israel during the tribulation period. It is where the antichrist will come from. However, further down in the Daniel 2 account, we read –

> "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."
> -Daniel 2:44

"Those kings" is referring to the same 10 kings mentioned already in Revelation (note that human feet have 10 toes which correspond to the 10 kings). The symbolism in this verse, which was of a millstone being cast into the sea, corresponds to the striking of Daniel's image on the feet. It is a violent and sudden destruction of this line of power that reaches back through the ages.

This did not occur in the past as preterists claim. Rather, the Roman Empire simply faded away from the world scene. But its underlying control and power remain in a latent form. It is coming together again, even before our eyes as the nations of Europe struggle to form a unit that will work for them. So far, the EU has not worked out well, and it will be refined until it matches the prophecies of Scripture. As this occurs, the world is rushing headlong into its final hour.

The scene of the millstone must have been marvelous to John's eyes, and he certainly stood in awe at the splendor of how Babylon the great will meet its final moment.

Human history has been marching along, and the wickedness of false religion – mixed with world power – has been great and will grow even greater in the end times. But the kingdom of our Lord and Savior is far, far greater. Soon it will come in all its splendor, and He will sit on His throne in glory. The Old Testament prophets speak in detail about that coming kingdom and what it will be like. It will be a time of awe and wonder on earth. It is coming soon to a Millennial Kingdom near you, and the center of its focus will be JESUS!

O Lord Jesus! How great it will be to see You exalted among the nations and to know that only the glory of Your kingdom will be acknowledged. Babylon will be gone forever and ever – never to be remembered again. But You, O Christ, will reign in glory and in the majesty of Your throne. How our hearts long for that day! Hallelujah and Amen.

The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. Revelation 18:22

The mighty angel just cast a stone, like a great millstone, into the sea and proclaimed the sure and sudden destruction of Babylon. With that, a list of what that means begins. It is not unlike a similar list found in Ezekiel 26 when referring to Tyre. His words begin with, "The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore."

The word *kitharódos*, or harpists, is only found twice in the Bible. The first was in verse 14:2, and now this is its last use. It comes from two words signifying a harp and a singer. Thus, it is one who plays and sings to the music he plays. The word translated as harp is *kithara*. It is the root of our modern-day guitar.

The word translated as "musicians" is *mousikos*. It is someone skilled in music. The word is found only here in Scripture. It is from the same root as the word *mousa*, or "a muse." One can see the root of our modern-day "music."

The "flutists" are seen only in Matthew 9:23 and here. It signifies a flute player.

The word translated as "trumpeters" is also found only in this verse. It signifies a trumpet player.

Taken together, the list is intended to mean that there will never be music again in this city. Her ruin is complete, and the things which were pleasing to the ears, mind, and soul are taken away. The city of fun and ease will be a city of ruin.

Next, it says, “No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore.” The word is from the Greek *technités*. One can see the root of our modern “technician.” It signifies an artisan, a builder, a craftsman, and so on. One could think of our modern-day carpenters, plumbers, electricians, air-condition workers, and so on. Whoever provides skills that complement the ability to build or maintain an infrastructure is probably included in this thought.

Finally, the verse ends with, “and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.” In Jeremiah 25:10, it says –

> “Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.”

This is probably the same thought here. The idea of the sound of a millstone is one of joy and happiness as the millers work together, passing the handle of the mill back and forth, singing, and rejoicing in the product that comes forth from their efforts. The idea then is that of happy, productive labor. This will be forever removed from Babylon.

Life application: Verses 22 and 23 further describe the losses in Babylon, but there is a difference between these two verses and the preceding ones which started in verse 18:11. The earlier verses spoke about the materials and commodities which were sold, but these speak about the people who make and use those commodities. Not only are all of the riches of Babylon gone, but so are the people.

The sweet sounds of the royal palace, the exciting evenings at the opera house, the outdoor concerts of rock and roll – they are all gone from Babylon forever. Even the radio stations and internet channels have gone silent. The only sound is that of ruin.

In addition to the melodies of the musicians, the sound of craftsmen plying their trade is gone. There will be no more beats of the hammer. The tempo of industry is silenced. The potter’s wheel and the tools of the sheet-metal workers have stopped their own melodious strains, never to be heard again. Industry is gone, and the life-sounds that have accompanied them are gone too.

All of it is all gone because of the wickedness of the people. Such a great and vast system has come to ruin in a moment. People were living their lives, eating, working, and listening to music when it all suddenly ended. Such was the state of Sodom and Gomorrah, and so will be the state of Babylon the great. When God determines an end to Babylon, it will be sudden and complete.

Unlike those who lived for this life only, Hebrews speaks of those who live by faith –

> "But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country.* Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."
>
> -Hebrews 11:16

What is your hope? If it is something in this life, it is temporary, perishing, and futile. But if it is in what God has promised for those who wait for Him, a better and eternal city lies ahead. The door is open for those who come to Him as He has determined. The way is made available to lead us there. It is through God's offer of peace and reconciliation. It is through JESUS.

How pleasant are the sounds of life, O Lord. You walked among us and listened to the sounds of workmen, You smelled the wood as it was cut and the bread as it was baked. You know how our minds are filled with joy from these things. But You are right in removing them when they become our idols. Help us to remember that all things came from You, and to You alone belongs our worship and our thanks. Amen.

The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. Revelation 18:23

The state of fallen Babylon continues to be described by the mighty angel. The great harlot, the city of apostasy and wickedness, has seen her end. As such, the angel next says, "The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore."

There will be enduring darkness in her. In the modern world, almost everything is lighted by electricity. Even the most remote villages have it for an hour or two a day. Not only will that not be the case, but even lamps fed by oil (as the Greek word means) will not be found there. The contrast to the Light of the World, Christ, is made evident. She rejected Him, and now she finds only darkness.

Next, it says, "and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore." The words are reflective of the words of Jeremiah, but – surprisingly – they refer to Judah when it was to be destroyed by Babylon –

> "Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp." Jeremiah 25:10

The difference, however, is that the next verse in Jeremiah says that this would continue for seventy years. The state of Babylon the great will be forever. Never again will the happy sounds of the bridegroom and the bride be heard again. And the explanation for this starts with the angel, saying, “For your merchants were the great men of the earth.”

The sentiment is similar to that given concerning Tyre in Ezekiel 27. The great and noblemen of the earth were those who traded with Babylon. Now, with their trade ended, there will never again be a reason to return to what once was. Babylon will stand desolate and ruined because of her actions. As the angel then states, “for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.”

The Greek more appropriately reads, “for in your sorcery.” Rome, and the place where the Vatican stands, could not be better described than this. Their teachings and doctrines are like a drug-induced spell upon the people.

Roman Catholics around the world reject Scripture when it conflicts with church dogma. They are seduced into harlotries with prayers to Mary and the saints instead of to God through Jesus – the one appointed Mediator between God and man. They constantly mix profane doctrines into the faith. On and on it goes. No opium den on earth could be more effective at stealing away the minds of people than the aberrant doctrines found there.

And more directly, the scope of her heretical teaching flows out to almost all nations on the earth, perfectly describing the state and level of her deceptions.

Life application: Babylon’s very mode and method of continuation is ended. And why? Because the great of the earth whom she deals with are the “movers and shakers” who are perceived to have control of everything they touch. They are the tycoons, the behind-the-scenes controllers of trade, commerce, communications, and so on. And their ways have been cunning and devious.

It is evident that this includes a host of troubling sins such as magic arts like astrology, horoscopes, tarot cards, palm readings, and even false religious rites. Black magic, Santeria, numerology, occult practices, idolatry, spiritualism, and so on. They can all be included in this. Any type of religious conduct which isn’t in accord with what the Lord has designated can be added to the list.

Further, the word certainly must be considered to include the use of drugs. Opiates, narcotics, and so forth, that produce altered states of mind are a part of their

merchandise, and they are exported to the people of the world. This deceives the people into believing in the lie of escape from reality.

Drug use is actually a way of having people lose contact with their Creator. It causes them to focus inward and towards selfish fulfillment of addictive desires. The connection between various mafia-related organizations that deal in such things to the RCC has long been noted.

These drugs are also used when mingled with spiritual practices. In this sense, they not only deprive people of a relationship with the Creator, but they drive people into adulterous religious avenues. As you can see, the sins of Babylon are many and the punishment for them is complete and final.

For those who are willing to step away from the false religious expressions and practices and come to Christ, they will find true grace and life in a biblically established relationship with God. That relationship is based on adherence to Scripture as the rule and guide of the faith, and Scripture is what tells us of God's offer of peace and right relationship with Him. It tells us of JESUS.

Jesus, You have released us from our lives of sin and addiction, and we ask that you continue to hold us safe in Your arms, keeping us from returning there. Please use us to lead others away from these things and toward you as well. Without You, our lives are like small ships tossed about on great waters of turmoil. Be with us and guide us, O Christ. Amen.

And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth." Revelation 18:24

Chapter 18 closes out with more reasons why Babylon will face destruction. In verses 18:2 & 3, we read these reasons for her destruction –

She has become:
- a dwelling place of demons
- a prison for every foul spirit
- a cage for every unclean and hated bird

Also:
- all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication
- the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her
- the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury

That list is now rounded out beginning with, “And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints.” A logical question to ask would be, “Is this referring only to the time during the tribulation, or is it referring to a succession of bloody events throughout history.” The answer is probably the latter.

The tribulation period is simply a reason for judgment on the world that was already deserved. As for Babylon the great, if indeed it is Rome (as is suggested here), this is not only a certain truth, it is one that has permeated her history.

Prophets, meaning those who speak forth the word of God, and saints, meaning those who have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, have been slaughtered by Rome since the beginning of the church. She has been drunk with the blood of these faithful while she has sat in splendid luxury.

Along with these, the verse finishes with, “and of all who were slain on the earth.” As often occurs in the Bible, not every “every” means “every,” and not each instant of “all” means “all.” The words are used in the superlative sense to show that the very nature of the thing being described demonstrates great abundance.

In this case, the amount of blood that has been shed by Babylon the great has been so copious that it is as if everyone ever slain is included in her murders. The same thought is given by Jesus when He spoke to the leaders of Israel –

> “Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and *some* of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, **35** that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. **36** Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” Matthew 23:34-36

Abel came long before the establishment of Israel, but the conduct of the leaders of Israel was such that the guilt of the blood of Abel could be said to have been heaped upon them. Such is the case with Rome. The list of her martyrs was great, and it will only become greater during the tribulation period. Therefore, the guilt is so great that all who were ever slain appear to lay in her streets.

<u>Life application:</u> The name Babylon comes from the word Babel which means “confusion.” Therefore, the idea is that the death of these righteous people comes from the confusion of what is right and proper. The confused thinking of the world finds its home in Babylon.

Babylon the great is a system of unrighteousness, false religion, unclear thinking, and confusion about God. It inevitably leads to the martyrdom of those who hold fast to God's word and the truth that there is one way to God and only one.

And more, that path is found in the grace of God and not in works by man – as if man can earn his way back to God. Babylon the great rejected this path long ago, and when it joins together in the end times with all of the other world religions, there will be only a state of complete apostasy from the truth in that body. Those who hold to the message of God in Christ will face martyrdom for their faith.

God has provided the way, He has done the work, and the offer of peace is made. It is a simple offer of grace that is to be received by faith. Come to the cross of Christ. Come to JESUS.

O God, we have rejected Your truth since the very beginning. Our first father, Adam, rejected it and we came under the penalty of sin and death. Cain rejected it, and killed his brother. Throughout the ages, we have turned our backs to You. And yet You sent us Jesus to lead us back to You and to forgive us. Thank You, O God, Amen.

CHAPTER 19

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!
Revelation 19:1

Different source texts will read a little differently here –

> And after these things I heard a great voice of a great multitude in the heaven, saying, 'Alleluia! the salvation, and the glory, and the honour, and the power, is to the Lord our God; YLT

> After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; NASB 1995

With the variations, the verse can now be analyzed. The words, "After these things," introduce a new train of thought into the narrative as has been seen elsewhere. In this case, the destruction of Babylon the great has just been noted, now a great rejoicing in the victory of the Lord over her comes into the narrative. As John says, "I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven."

The vision starts with hearing, "a great voice, like voice of a multitude in heaven," not with a single voice. The answer to who these are is found in the previous chapter, verse 20 –

> "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and *you* holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"

It is the sound of the many worshipers there before the throne in heaven as they raise their voices in praise, "saying, Alleluia!"

This is the Greek form of the Hebrew words Hallelujah. That comes from the words *halal*, or praise (literally to shine), and *Yah*, a shortened form of the divine name Yehovah. This is the first of four times the word will be used in the New Testament. All four uses will be in this chapter of Revelation. The multitude are together praising the self-existent Creator God, the I AM THAT I AM of Exodus 3:14, and who is then proclaimed throughout the Old Testament.

“Hallelujah” is the phrase that today most closely unites believers from all over the world. Anywhere that the true God is proclaimed, a few words from Hebrew are almost universally understood. Chief among them are “Hallelujah” and “Amen.” These two words, in particular, seem to transfer to all languages on earth, and they will unite all souls in heaven’s praise as well.

Next, it says, “Salvation and glory and honor and power.”

Salvation – the Greek word is *sótéria*. It is that which is brought to the people through the workings of God in Christ. For example, Paul says –

> “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”
> -Romans 1:16

Glory – it is the Greek word *doxa*. When ascribed to God, it conveys the thought of His infinite and intrinsic worth.

Honor – In Greek, the word is *timé*. It speaks of that which has value in the eyes of the beholder. Thus, in the case of God, it is that which is of infinite value that is being ascribed to Him.

Power – The Greek word is *dunamis*. It speaks of the ability to perform. When speaking of the power of God, it signifies His infinite ability to work out His plans effectively. There is nothing that He sets forth to accomplish that He will also not perform.

Each of these attributes is then said to “belong to the Lord our God!” They are His possession in their fullest sense, and thus it is acknowledged as such by His creatures. His redemptive plans were spoken forth, and He has brought them to pass because of His ability to do so.

<u>Life application:</u> The heavenly congregation was told in the previous chapter to rejoice at the fall of Babylon and now they do so in a resounding cry of exultation. But who is the Lord God that they are praising? A clue is found in Jesus’ words of Luke.

The word “salvation” in the Old Testament is quite often translated from the word *yeshuah.* This is the Hebrew name of Jesus, or Yeshua. Throughout the Bible, hints of His coming are given in the Old Testament and puns or plays on His name are given in the New. A good example of one such pun is from Jesus’ own mouth –

> "And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.'" Luke 19:9

"Salvation" came to the house of Zacchaeus, both in the spiritual sense, but it also came in the literal sense when Jesus (Yeshua/salvation) came to dine with him.

Along with "salvation" the people also proclaim that "glory," "honor," and "power" belong to the Lord God. Each of these descriptions is used both of the Lord (Yehovah) in the Old Testament and to Jesus in the New. In fact, in Isaiah, the Lord says that He would not give His glory to another. The New Testament descriptions of Jesus' glory are then confirmations of His deity.

The Lord has revealed Himself to mankind clearly and without confusion. He is the image of the invisible God, and in Him dwells all of the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Alleluia! He is JESUS!

How wonderful it is to know that we have You, O Lord Jesus, to reveal to us the love and greatness of Your Father. You have bridged the gap between the finite and the infinite so that we can now have a Mediator who both understands our weaknesses and who also is able to petition for us to our Heavenly Father. What a great and splendid Lord You are. Amen.

For true and righteous *are* His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants *shed* by her." Revelation 19:2

The loud voice of the great multitude in heaven that began to cry out praise to God in the previous verse now continues with the words, "For true and righteous *are* His judgments." The word translated as "true" has already been seen five times in Revelation. It is an adjective that connects what is true with its source of origin. It is thus that which is genuine.

The word translated as "righteous" speaks of that which conforms to God's own being. As these describe His judgments, it means that they are made in connection with His character and nature. What has been determined by Him is in perfect accord with who He is. Of His judgments, they next cry out, "because He has judged the great harlot."

This takes the reader back to Chapter 17 –

> "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, **2** with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.'" Revelation 17:1, 2

From there, Chapters 17 and 18 detailed the state of Babylon the great, exposing her wickedness, and then detailing the Lord's judgments upon her. These came in complete accord with His perfect and holy nature. She reaped what was deserving because it was she "who corrupted the earth with her fornication."

The word translated as "corrupted" is in the imperfect tense (literally "was corrupting") demonstrating the continuous nature of her fornication. Through her actions, the earth was continuously being corrupted.

One can think of the false teaching of Roman Catholicism. Instead of sharing the gospel, which is by grace through faith, she is teaching a false works-based gospel. Instead of revealing Christ to the world, she is consolidating power and setting forth agendas. In her actions, there is only a corrupting influence, hidden behind the guise of religion. The corrupting nature of Babylon the great brought only corruption, "and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants *shed* by her."

These words demonstrate that, above all, the judgment against her is because of the great blood guilt she bears. She has been behind the death of innumerable martyrs through "holy wars," inquisitions, neglect of the gospel to those who should have heard it, and on and on. In Revelation, one can see that idolatry and persecutions stand as her most eminent traits as her influence has spread out and corrupted the earth.

The words of this verse witness against Babylon the great, but they also are a fulfillment of the promise made to the martyrs recorded in Chapter 6 –

> "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. **10** And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' **11** Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were,* was completed." Revelation 6:9-11

The Lord is the Avenger of Blood of those who were slain by this harlot, and He acted to right the wrongs done against them. Of note is that the Hebrew word for "kinsman redeemer" and for "avenger of blood" is the same, *goel*. In other words, Jesus Christ is both our Redeemer and our Avenger.

As such, His judgments are both true and righteous. His judgment of Babylon is the obvious outcome for her because of her violations against His redeemed. She was judged in righteousness and her judgment is both complete and final.

Life application: God's nature is seen in many more moral virtues, love, holiness, righteousness, truth, and so on. Love is one of them, but to proclaim the love of God only, without proclaiming His other moral qualities, is to proclaim a heretical view of His nature. It is like denying the Trinity because God's nature must be considered in its fullness, or one has created a god in his own mind and to fit his own desires.

This verse proclaims two of his moral virtues – righteousness and justice. As these express His very nature, it means that judgment for wrongdoing must come from Him. He cannot arbitrarily overlook offenses. All must be met and judged according to His perfect nature.

As there are many chapters between the saints call for their blood to be avenged, and the actual record of that having been done, we can understand other aspects of God's nature. He is orderly because He has a predetermined concept of when His justice and righteousness will be displayed. He is patient, not wanting any to perish, but to come to a saving knowledge of His work through Jesus. He is merciful, not taking vengeance immediately on the sins committed by the people of the world. In fact, if He did, no person would be alive because we are all fallen, and we would all be destroyed immediately. He is also holy, full of grace, and truthful. Each of these qualities is revealed in the pages of Scripture.

God is great, and so it is of the utmost importance that we do not lose sight of any of His moral virtues or attempt to place one above the others. They are a part of His very nature. To skew His nature can only lead others to a false understanding of Him. As you read the Bible, think on how God's nature is revealed in His actions and in how those actions are presented. In this, you will get a much fuller sense of what God is truly like. When you get this better grasp of Him, you can then more fully appreciate the incarnation. God's expression of Himself through the incarnation gives us the fullest sense of who He is. What you understand concerning God is perfectly revealed in our Lord, JESUS.

Lord God, You have given us a detailed and accurate revelation of Yourself in the pages of the Bible. Help us to contemplate who You are, what You are like, and to then always act in accord with what we see recorded there. Help us to be faithful followers of You. May we emulate our Lord Jesus who is the full expression of who You are. Thank You for our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" Revelation 19:3

The rejoicing over Babylon the great continues now with the words, "Again they said." The Greek reads, "And a second time they said." There is specificity to the word because what is said is forming a pattern that will be explained in a minute. For now, what they said is, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever." The Greek reads "to the ages of the ages."

The rejoicing over Babylon is great as her burning reaches skyward. It is as if her destruction is an offering before the Lord as the billows rise. The thought of smoke rising in this manner takes the reader back to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah –

> "And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. **28** Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace. **29** And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt."
>
> -Genesis 19:27-29

Concerning these "Alleluias," they are forming a pattern that corresponds to the four expressions of deliverance promised by God in Exodus 6:6, 7 which state –

> "Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I *am* the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. **7** I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

These two verses, given by God to His people form the basis of the works of Jesus in redemptive history and which culminate in the joyous expressions found in Revelation 19. Though not found in Scripture, it is worthy of note that during the Passover ceremony, the people of Israel have four cups of wine present during the rite. The first

cup is the *Kiddush* (meaning "sanctification"). It accompanies the thought "I will bring out." Thus, it is the cup of *salvation*.

It was prefigured in the "taking out of the people from Egypt," but it is realized in the act of removing from God's people Babylon the great, the system of false religion, and into the kingdom of Christ. Thus, believers are "sanctified" in the presence of a holy God. When the first "Alleluia" was given, along with it the great multitude proclaimed, "Salvation and glory and honor and power *belong* to the Lord our God!"

The first cup is realized in the salvation and thus "sanctification" of the people as they are removed from the penalty of sin.

Now, we see the second "Alleluia." This corresponds with the second cup of the Passover, the *Maggid* (meaning "preacher"). It accompanies the thought "I will deliver." Thus, it is the cup of *deliverance*.

This was prefigured by the "delivery from Egyptian slavery," but it is realized in the deliverance from slavery to sin and the oppression of Babylon the great. When this "Alleluia" is given, the great multitude proclaims, "Her smoke rises forever and ever." Just as the Egyptians were destroyed and unable to recapture the Israelites, Babylon the great is destroyed and will never again be able to harm God's people – her smoke rises forever and ever.

The second cup is realized in the delivery of the people from the power of sin.

There are two more cups that come during the Passover ceremony, and they continue to prefigure the heavenly chorus as the people of God move closer to their ultimate state in His presence.

<u>Life application:</u> The Bible is a marvelous book, filled with patterns and typology. And it is all centered on the Person and work of the Messiah. Be sure to read it daily, contemplate it always, and let it fill your heart and soul with the hope that it provides to man. The restoration of all things is coming, and it is the Bible that gives us the grand plan in how that is being worked out.

God is doing a great thing for His children. To become one of them, call out for God's offer of peace and reconciliation. Call out for JESUS.

Thank You Lord for the surety that we are not waiting on the coming of the Messiah, but on the second coming of the Messiah! We have in Jesus complete freedom from the

penalty of sin. We can grow in holiness because the power of sin has been removed from us. How we long for the day when we are removed from the presence of sin as well! Yes, how we look forward to that day! Amen.

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" Revelation 19:4

The praises to the Lord God are seen to continue in this verse. In the previous three verses, it mentioned the great multitude in heaven. Now, it says, "And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures."

These twenty-four elders and the four living creatures mentioned first in chapter 4 are brought back into focus one last time. As in verses such as 5:8, when there is an exclamation of the Lord's glory, it says they, "fell down and worshiped God."

This is an act of praising God who accomplished the victory, and He alone is ultimately to receive the credit for what has occurred in the destruction of Babylon the great.

The word is written in advance to show His intent and purpose for that to come about, regardless as to the way in which it happens (meaning an invading army, a nuclear blast, a naturally occurring catastrophe, or so on). Ultimately, the judgment on the harlot is of God, and He is to be worshiped for it. Of God, however, it says, "who sat on the throne."

This then is referring to Jesus. It says in Hebrews 12 –

> "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us,* and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1, 2

The "right hand of the throne of God" means the position of authority and power. It is not a physical location, but rather a designation. Further, God is Spirit and therefore doesn't have parts. The Bible tells us that no man has seen God at any time (1 John 4:12), it also says that no man has seen nor can see God (1 Timothy 6:16).

Even Moses could only see the Lord's glory as it passed by Him. He had to stand in the cleft of a rock, and that rock is Jesus. We can only see God's glory if we are hidden in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, this verse in Revelation is referring to the Person of Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God according to the book of Colossians and He is the one who reveals the unseen Father to us. He is the God/Man. Therefore, the praise is directed to Him, "saying, 'Amen! Alleluia!'"

The words speak of surety and praise. "Amen" can be paraphrased as "So let it be." "Alleluia" means "Praise the Lord." It is Jesus who is the Amen and to Him our praises are to be directed. The heavenly scene before John confirms this to us, setting the pattern for our own worship and praise.

For now, when the elders and living creatures fall down in worship, they first exclaim "Amen!" This is in response to the statements which come in combination to the first two "Alleluias." Their proclamation of "Amen" is meant to emphatically confirm what has been said. This then is a resounding approval of the cries of the great multitude.

After this word of confirmation, the third "Alleluia" is uttered. This corresponds to the third cup of the Passover ceremony – the *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after meals). It accompanies the thought "I will redeem." Thus, it is the cup of redemption. Redemption is the act of re-purchasing something that was sold. Man was sold to sin through the disobedience of Adam. But God, through Jesus Christ, has redeemed man from that fallen state.

This was prefigured by God's redemptive act on Israel when they were brought through the waters of the Red Sea, but it is realized in its fullness in the act of removing the saved believer from Babylon the great – redeeming them to God. Thus, the penalty of sin has been paid and man stands justified before God because of Jesus.

The third cup is realized in the delivery of the people from the problem of sin. As the smoke of Babylon rises forever and ever, so the greatness of the work of the Lord rises even higher.

Life application: At times, we hear people complain about God being unfair for letting little children die, for allowing cancer to take a spouse, or for some other reason that affects someone personally. But the fact is that we got ourselves into the mess that we are in. God owes us nothing. On the other hand, God has given of Himself to bring us out of this fallen state, and to restore us to Himself.

To blame God for the tragedies of the world is a foolish and selfish way of looking at our situation. When we realize that God has set forth the plan, seen it through, and will continue to see it through until restoration is realized, how can we do anything but

praise Him. It is through His mighty work that man is redeemed from his fallen state. Hallelujah! Thank God for what He has done for us! Thank the Lord for JESUS!

Lord God, it is wonderful to look back on the Exodus account and see that all the things You did for Israel only prefigured what You would do for all of humanity. The state of sin which had us in bondage is removed from us when we call on Jesus. Someday we will even be free from its presence when we dwell in Your presence forever! Hallelujah and Amen!

Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" Revelation 19:5

In the previous verse, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, saying, "Alleluia." With that in mind, this verse now says, "Then a voice came from the throne." As the voice is from the throne itself, there is no need to assume it is any voice other than Jesus. It is He who sits in the position of power and authority, and it is He who has the right to say, "Praise our God."

He is both fully God and fully Man. In this, He calls forth for the praise of God, beginning with "all you His servants." They are words similar to those that open Psalms 134 and 135 –

> "Behold, bless the LORD,
> All *you* servants of the LORD,
> Who by night stand in the house of the LORD!" Psalm 134:1

> "Praise the LORD!
> Praise the name of the LORD;
> Praise *Him,* O you servants of the LORD!" Psalm 135:1

He next says, "and those who fear Him, both small and great." That is reflected in Psalm 115:13 –

> "He will bless those who fear the LORD,
> *Both* small and great."

One can see how the book of Revelation relies so heavily on the Old Testament writings, again and again calling forth the notion that the Lord, Yehovah of the Old, is the Lord Jesus of the New. He is the fulfillment of all Messianic anticipations, and He is the

incarnation of the Lord – fully revealed to His people to behold the great things God has done by His own mighty power.

Life application: This verse is an introduction to the fourth Alleluia pictured by the fourth cup of the Passover. Before arriving at it, think on what this fourth "Alleluia" cup will represent.

As far as what has been said in this verse, there is the note that God is to be praised, and we are to forever keep on praising Him. He is worthy of great honor and glory because He is the Creator, the Sustainer, our Savior, our Deliverer, our Redeemer, and our Hope. We are to give Him all the praise and honor we can, and we should never let it end!

All people, both small and great, who have called out to God through Christ have been freed from the bondage of sin and unrighteousness and have moved to an imputed state of righteousness. In this, we have been granted eternal life. No wonder the voice from the throne asks us to praise God! We are being reminded of the most significant part of our existence – the conversion of our soul from condemnation to salvation.

Surely God is worthy of all praise for that! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord for the coming of JESUS!

Who is like You, O God? You are great and greatly to be praised. We mope over the things that cause us temporary grief. We get frustrated and wish that things were clearer in our daily walk. We show bitterness when things don't go right. But You have already taken care of the greatest issues of all. You have directed us from death to life. What more could we ask for? Thank You, O Lord – thank You for Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen.

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Revelation 19:6

John had just noted the "voice from the throne." It called out saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" In response to that comes a stunning reply. John says, "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude."

The meaning conveyed is like that at a pep rally. The great multitude in heaven was calling out in verse 1. They again called out in verse 3. Then the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures joined in as well in verse 4. After that, the Lord prompted the

multitudes as was just cited above. With His words spoken, the great multitude breaks forth “as the sound of many waters.”

This is the same terminology used of the Lord’s voice in Revelation 1;15. Such a voice was again heard in Chapter 14 –

> “And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps.”
> -Revelation 14:2

So great is this cry that it has the same effect, as if many waters were crashing and flowing in a beautiful harmony. Such a din of noise is recorded by Isaiah in a negative sense at the rebuke of God –

> “Woe to the multitude of many people
> *Who* make a noise like the roar of the seas,
> And to the rushing of nations
> *That* make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!
> **13** The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters;
> But *God* will rebuke them and they will flee far away,
> And be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind,
> Like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.” Isaiah 17:12, 13

Rather than a rebuke, however, this noise is one of elation, joy, and triumph. In addition to this, John says, “and as the sound of mighty thunderings.” This is now the fifth and final time that such thunderings are recorded in Revelation. They are a reflection of the power and glory of the Lord as He visits His people. Such thunderings were also recorded at Sinai at the giving of the law.

With this appeal for praise of God being responded to, it is as if everything in creation has come to a culminating expression of elation, “saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!’”

This is the fourth and final Alleluia recorded in Revelation. It is one that acknowledges the omnipotence of the Lord God, meaning Jesus. The Greek reads emphatically, “the Lord God, the Almighty.” He has destroyed Babylon the great. Now, purity of worship will cover the earth. And so, this tremendous shout rounds out the promises of God foreshadowed all the way back at the time of the exodus.

With this realized, the verses from Exodus 6 looked at in a previous verse can be reviewed again –

> "Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I *am* the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. **7** I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." Exodus 6:6, 7

This fourth "Alleluia" is the consummation of the thought "I will be your God." It corresponds to the fourth cup of the Passover, the *Hallel* (meaning "praise"), and accompanies the thought "I will take." Thus, it is the cup of *adoption* or *consummation*. This was prefigured by the joining of God to His people at Mt. Sinai. As He told them then –

> "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. **6** And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."
>
> -Exodus 19:5, 6

This is only truly realized in the final destruction of Babylon the great when God's people will live free from her oppression and reign as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Just as God dwelt among His people in a tabernacle of material, so He will forever dwell among His people in a tabernacle of flesh – in the Person of Jesus the Lord. The fourth cup prefigures the establishment of Christ's eternal kingdom, and it is realized in the delivery of the people from the very presence of sin.

Hallelujah, for our Lord, our wonderful Lord Jesus, reigns!

<u>Life application:</u> Through Christ's sacrifice, man has been freed from the penalty of sin. In the sanctification of His people, we are freed from the power of sin. Someday, the presence of sin will be removed from us forever. This is the hope of the redeemed. We will be returned to the state we were intended to be in from the beginning.

This marvelous place and state is only available because God intervened in the affairs of man by sending His Messiah to bring us back to Himself. Without Him, there would only

be ever-increasing wickedness. But through the tender mercies of our God, He has sent our Lord to restore us to Himself. Let us thank God for this gift of love and grace. Let us thank God for JESUS.

O God, the beauty of Your word, and how it reveals what You are doing in human history, is beyond imagination. Stir up in us the desire to read it and peer into its mysteries all the days of our lives. Help us to understand the meaning of the symbolism given throughout it which reveals to us Your workings in and through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." Revelation 19:7

The four Alleluias have been called out, and God has been exalted through the praise of His people over the judgment of Babylon. With that accomplished, the voice of the great multitude continues now by saying, "Let us be glad and rejoice." Being glad and rejoicing is an often-repeated set of words from elsewhere in Scripture, where God's people are glad and rejoice for His wondrous works.

In this, the victory of the Lord over the falsities of Babylon the great is accomplished. The truth of God in Christ has been vindicated, and the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the seas. It is a reason to be glad and rejoice, but that state only anticipates what lies ahead. But for these things, the people continue by saying, "and give Him glory."

The idea here is that stated in Psalm 115 –

> "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
> But to Your name give glory,
> Because of Your mercy,
> Because of Your truth." Psalm 115:1

God alone deserves the glory for what has occurred. His word was written long before, and it foretold what would come about, showing His transcendence over time. But more, His word tells of how sin entered the world, and it tells of all that God would do in the stream of human existence to make the redemption come about, including the sending of His Christ to accomplish all that was necessary for it to be so. This includes the thought of Christ's sacrifice. As it said in Revelation 13:8 –

> "...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

God sent Christ to die. Hence, He is called “the Lamb slain.” Now, the rejoicing and giving of glory to God is shouted out with that specific thought in mind. As it next says, “for the marriage of the Lamb has come.”

It is the sacrificial death of Christ that is focused on, and it is that which has made what lies ahead possible. It is through His death that victory has been realized. It is through His death that life has been granted. And it is the Lamb slain, and who was raised again, to whom the marriage is to be made. And it is through the Lamb slain that “His wife has made herself ready.”

It is Christ who prepares His people for the marriage. This will actually be explained in the next verse. As far as the idea of the wedding in relation to the Lord, many passages in both the Old and New Testaments give insights into it, such as Isaiah 54:1-8; Ezekiel 16:7-14; Hosea 2:19, 20; Matthew 9:15; John 3:39; 2 Corinthians 11:2; and Ephesians 5:25-27.

There are even typological hints of what Christ would do for His people throughout the books of Moses such as in the story of Isaac and Rebekah, the story of Jacob and his wives, and even in such obscure passages as those found in Deuteronomy 22:13-29. These, and other such references, give us information concerning what is now being presented in Revelation.

However, the idea of a single betrothal/marriage is not all there is in the prophetic scenario. Believers are individually betrothed to Christ when we believe the gospel. The church will be presented as the Bride of Christ as stated in Ephesians 5. This will occur at the rapture of the church. Israel will be united to Christ as a bride as is indicated in various Old and New Testament passages. And then there is the general thought of being united as a bride to Christ in Revelation 21.

It is true that in Revelation 21, the “holy Jerusalem” is called “the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” but it has already been said in the epistles and earlier in Revelation that the temple is made up of believers (Ephesians 2:21, Hebrews 3:6, 1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 3:12, and etc.).

Life application: In stark contrast to the great whore of the preceding chapters comes the description which follows her destruction – a bride is made ready. A bride is normally dressed in white, a color that symbolizes her purity, and such is the case – as we will see in the coming verse – with the bride of the Lamb.

This is in contrast to the outward refinements of the whore. She was dressed extravagantly, but she was filled with impurity and wickedness. Such is the case with all false religion, but the world will see that there is One God, and He has chosen one avenue of restoration to Him – which is through Jesus Christ.

All souls who have followed false religion will realize the error of their ways when they see those who have given up on self and placed their trust in Jesus for their salvation being brought into the very presence of the Creator. The great multitude (verse 1) exclaims that this is a time of being glad and rejoicing. It is a time of giving God the glory for His wondrous works. The time of the marriage of the Lamb.

At the beginning of the Gospel of John, John the Baptist said – "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! **30** This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me'" (John 1:29, 30). The Greek word John used there which is translated as "Lamb" is *amnos*. It was used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to indicate a "sacrificial lamb." However, the term used in Revelation is *arion*. The sacrificial and atoning element of Jesus' work was completed at the cross.

The Lamb of Revelation is the one who has prevailed. The atonement is complete, and it is only through His work that salvation is possible. The only other time the word *arion* is used outside of the book of Revelation is at the end of the book of John, after the cross, when Jesus met with the apostles. At this time, Jesus called His followers His "lambs," using this term. In other words, those who have called on Him are like Him – pure, spotless, and undefiled; they bear His image.

The bride of Christ "has made herself ready" through the blood of Christ. The imagery is both beautiful and astonishing. If you ever have doubts about God's good plan for you, put them away. Christ really came, He really paid the sin-debt for His people, and He really will come again to take us to Himself. We will be in the presence of Christ forever and ever… a spotless bride with the perfect Husband – He is JESUS!

Heavenly Father, You sent Your only-begotten Son to pay our sin debt, and then You raised Him up to everlasting life and have called us to You through Him. And now, just as You presented Adam with an innocent and beautiful bride, so You have readied us to be a bride to Jesus, having purified us through His blood. Great and awesome are You, O God! Hallelujah to the Lamb! Amen.

And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Revelation 19:8

With the words of the final Alleluia of praise complete, a praise that ended with "and His wife has made herself ready," John next says, "And to her it was granted."

The meaning is that something is to be bestowed upon the bride. The bestowal is logically tied to the words, "His wife has made herself ready." With this in mind, it says that she is "to be arrayed in fine linen." The fine linen, as has been seen quite a few times in Scripture, is a symbol of purity. That is then defined by the next words "clean and bright."

The words not only signify purity, but absolute purity. Clean and bright can then be contrasted to the thought expressed by both Paul and Peter of that which has a spot or blemish. With that stated, this is speaking of those who come before God as a bride to His Son who have been purified by Christ. It is the imputed righteousness of Christ that is being referred to. First from Paul –

> "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, **26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, **27** that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." Ephesians 5:25-27

The purity of Christ's sacrifice, having given Himself for His bride, is what is then endowed upon her. Peter continues the thought –

> "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; **18** knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 2 Peter 2:17-19

Peter says that "the precious blood of Christ" is what redeems His people. The blood speaks of His sacrifice. When the blood is shed, it signifies His death because the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11).

This fine linen is given to the bride as a symbol of her purity before God. With that in mind, John next explicitly states the meaning of it, saying, "for the fine linen is the

righteous acts of the saints." The Greek emphasizes the words. It more literally reads, "For the fine linen the righteousnesses of the saints is."

There is a one to one comparison being made with the word "is." Further, the noun translated by the NKJV as "righteous acts" is a plural noun. Of this word, there are two general translations to be derived. The first is the "righteous acts" of the saints. The other is the "righteousness" of the saints.

There is no small difference between the two. The word in Greek is *dikaiōmata*. As noted, it is plural – "righteousnesses." The plural is therefore what causes different interpreters to come to different conclusions. As noted in the citations from Paul and Peter above, it is Christ who purifies believers. The fact is that, without Christ, we are marred and unclean in the presence of God. Because of this, Jesus' own words in John 3:18 show our true state before salvation –

> "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Only when one comes to Christ is a person purified and acceptable before God. Only in this purified state are our deeds considered acceptable. Once it is so, our works can be termed "good." As Paul says –

> "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10

Because of this, Cambridge (and others as well) says –

"Rather, the righteous acts. Every good work done by every single saint goes to make up the perfect glory of the Church as it shall be when at last complete. The doctrine of the Communion of Saints is contained in, or follows from, that of the holy Catholic Church."

The analysis is incorrect. As noted by Jesus (cited from John 3:18), all people are already condemned. Going to heaven is not the purpose of salvation; it is a benefit of it. "Salvation" implies "from," not "for." Therefore, there must be a covering of the true state of the individual. This covering is the atoning work of Jesus and the imputing of His righteousness to us. Jesus said in Revelation 3:5 –

> "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

To "overcome" means to pass from death to life, from unrighteousness to righteousness, from condemnation to salvation, from the devil to Jesus. This is what Paul again refers to in Philippians 3 –

> "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." Philippians 3:8, 9

This verse, therefore, is speaking of the "righteousnesses" of the saints, not in deeds done *after* salvation (as a cumulative effect, thus purifying us and adorning us in white), but the "righteousnesses" of all the saints cumulatively.

In other words, "This is Sergio's righteousness, and this is also Rhoda's righteousness, and this is Hideko's righteousness, and this is Mfumbe's righteousness." It speaks of the righteousness of each saved soul individually which combined is many righteousnesses. In the end, each saved person's righteousness is the same and came in the same way – it is granted to the believer by God because of faith, and faith alone, in the work of Jesus Christ.

This is why following a false gospel cannot bring righteousness. It is the warning of Paul that is often repeated in his epistles, such as to the Corinthians –

> "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. **3** But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. **4** For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!" 2 Corinthians 11:2-4

Deeds are excluded in the imputation of righteousness. Even any deeds which are accepted by God, as James clearly explains in Chapter 2 of his epistle, are deeds of faith. There are no deeds accomplished, prior to or after salvation, which count towards the credit of the individual unless they are done in faith. And this, in turn, points right back

to Jesus. Our faith in what Jesus has done is demonstrated in deeds that are based on that faith. Therefore, the proper and only reasonable translation of this verse in Revelation is one that refers to the righteousness of the saints, not of the righteous acts (or deeds) of the saints.

This may sound as if hairs have been split, but it is one of the Bible's central tenets, and the difference in this ultimately leads to one of the greatest divisions in all of Christianity. This culminated in the decision rendered at the Council of Trent in 1546 whereby the Roman Catholic Church, in reaction to the Protestant Reformation, determined that Christ's work was insufficient in and of itself to justify us before God, but rather our works are needed to further justify us.

Life application: In Revelation 17:4, it referred to the great harlot being "arrayed in purple and scarlet." Those were garments she arrayed herself in, claiming royal status and the act of purification through sacrifice (certain deeds of righteousness that supposedly could make up for the supposed insufficiency of Christ's work).

On the other hand, the bride is given her covering. It was not of her own effort, but it is granted by faith, and faith alone in the work of Christ.

Only one avenue to acceptability before God can be true. We are either justified by Jesus' work alone, or by our own efforts apart from Christ, or by His work, plus. The Bible is clear – it is through the work of Jesus alone that we are saved, justified, sanctified, and glorified. The garments we receive will be all of Jesus, or they won't sufficiently cover us in the presence of God.

Be aware of the subtleties of various translations and determine to research them and understand them. And then, once you have understood them, stand firmly on what is being conveyed. It is by faith in what God has done through Christ, and only that, by which we are given the beautiful garments of righteousness. Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. Hallelujah to JESUS!

Lord, help us to proclaim the gospel of our salvation rightly. We are saved by grace through faith and that it is not of works lest any man should boast. When we are granted the precious, white, and pure garments on that great day, we will faithfully acknowledge that all the glory belongs to Jesus alone! Let us never trust in our own goodness, but in what You have done through Him. Amen.

Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." Revelation 19:9

The previous verse spoke of the granting of the great multitude the fine linen, clean and bright. It then noted that the fine linen "is the righteous acts of the saints." As explained, the words should read "righteousnesses of the saints." With that stated, it now says, "Then he said to me." Who it is that is being referred to here is not easily determined.

It could be the mighty angel of verse 18:21. If that is so, then that angel is not Christ, as will be seen in a moment. It could also be the angel of verse 17:1, or some other recorded voice that was not specified as to its source.

Whoever "he" is, it is certainly not the Lord Himself speaking. This will be understood from the next verse. For now, that same angel now says, "Write." At times, a prophet is given the word of God and only later records it. At times, God uses the actions and living accounts of people (such as the book of Acts) as a part of His word. Sometimes, as here, there is to be a direct one-to-one, word-for-word account of what God wants written. This is such a verse.

He is giving specific instructions to John to carefully write down what he will next say. The direction to "write" is given twelve times in Revelation. This is the eleventh, and it is the only time that it is not the Lord who directly tells John to do so. The others are spoken by the Lord directly, or – as in verse 14:13 – it is implied when that verse noted, "Then I heard a voice from heaven."

For now, what John is instructed to write is, "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" This is now the fourth of seven blessings stated in Revelation (see Revelation 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14).

The marriage supper is a concept Jesus spoke of to Israel in Matthew 22:1-14 and in Matthew 25:1-13. It is also spoken of in Luke 14:15-24. A dining event is also alluded to in Revelation 3:20 where Christ speaks to the church.

As this is the "marriage supper of the Lamb," it signifies that those who have been invited are those who have been cleansed by Christ in His sacrificial role as the Lamb of God. The call is referring to being made acceptable to God through His work. This sacrificial aspect of this supper is typified by the taking of the Lord's Supper that Paul details in 1 Corinthians 11 –

> "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; **24** and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." **25** In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it,* in remembrance of Me."
> **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown notes of the word "called" that it means "effectually, not merely externally. The 'unto,' or 'into,' seems to express this: not merely invited to (Greek, 'epi'), but called INTO, so as to be partakers of (Greek, 'eis')." It is the same expression used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 –

> "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, **5** that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, **6** even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, **7** so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, **8** who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

With these things understood, the verse continues, saying, "And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God.'" The meaning is that what has been conveyed is absolute truth, based on the nature of God, who is True. They are reliable and will come to pass exactly as they have been relayed.

Life application: In the parable in Matthew 22:1-14 (referenced above), Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven and about a wedding ceremony. An invitation goes out and it is rejected by a host of people, and so the invitation is extended to more people, even "the bad" are invited. At the end of the parable, we see the results of rejecting the invitation where those who were initially called and didn't come, and those who attempted to come in without proper garments, are cast into "outer darkness" where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The parable ends with, "For many are called, but few *are* chosen." In other words, just because everyone is given an invitation, the true "called" are only those who accept it.

For those who follow the concept of "universalism" where all will go to heaven, there will be a sad surprise. Jesus' offer is made to everyone, but only those who accept it will be allowed entry into God's paradise. Those who are called to the marriage supper of

the Lamb are termed “blessed.” If one is in attendance, it is because they have accepted the work of Christ and shunned all other supposed avenues to God. The state of blessedness will be fully realized when we behold the Lord in all His glory. Because all things were created by Him, every hope and desire is fully realized in Him.

Further, the statements of the Lord are sure, because what the Lord conveys is a reflection of who He is. What is pronounced about the marriage supper is as sure as the ground under our feet. Nothing can change it, and nothing will hinder it. Have you received your wedding garments? If not, call on the Lord today. The banquet will be glorious, and it is available to any who call out to JESUS.

Oh God, how precious is the hope we possess! Thank you for Jesus, thank You for His cross, thank You for the resurrection. Through Him, we have the opportunity for complete restoration of all that was lost. And when we call on Him, that opportunity becomes the surety of a promise which cannot be thwarted. How we long for that day! Amen.

And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See *that you do* not *do that!* I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Revelation 19:10

The one speaking with John just stated that his words “are the true sayings of God.” Either misunderstanding what is being conveyed or misinterpreting what should be done with such a statement, John next says, “And I fell at his feet to worship him.”

It is unclear what John was thinking concerning the messenger. It could be that John thought he was deity and fell at his feet in order to worship him as such. This is seen at various times in Scripture, such as in Genesis 18:2 when Abraham bowed before the Lord and those with him. Or it could be that John assumed that a divine messenger, even if not God, was to be worshipped. Cornelius made this mistake in Acts 10:25 when Peter arrived with a divine message.

Whatever the case, John made an error in his thinking when he fell in worship. In response to John’s act, it next says, “But he said to me, “See *that you do* not *do that!*” The Greek is much simpler, saying, “See not.”

It is a direct expression that what John did is inappropriate. But equally important is that this certainly shows the authenticity of the account. John would not have written such words, putting himself into such an embarrassing situation if they were not true. With this in mind, the messenger continues by saying, “I am your fellow servant.”

In saying this, various meanings are possible. The first is that this is a heavenly angel, and yet he is placing himself in a comparable position to John, stating that angels are fellow servants in the service of God. Or it could be that this is a human who is conveying the message of Christ to John. The word translated as "angel" simply means a messenger.

The context determines the interpretation, and the interpretation here is actually not clear. In Revelation 22:16, it will say (probably speaking of this same messenger), "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches." This is the same general thought as that given in the last book of the Old Testament –

> "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi." Malachi 1:1
>
> "Behold, I send My messenger,
> And he will prepare the way before Me.
> And the Lord, whom you seek,
> Will suddenly come to His temple,
> Even the Messenger of the covenant,
> In whom you delight.
> Behold, He is coming,"
> Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1

In Malachi 1:1, the name Malachi means "My Messenger," coming from the word *malak*, meaning an angel (and thus a messenger). That is clearly speaking of the human prophet. In Malachi 3:1, the words "My messenger" are translated from the same word, *malaki*, used in 1:1. This is speaking of the coming of John the Baptist. The same word, *malak*, is then used when speaking of Christ, the "Messenger" of the covenant.

Understanding this, we can see that it is not perfectly clear that the "angel" referred to by Jesus in Revelation 22 is an angelic being. In fact, it appears that in all three instances – the prophet Malachi, John the Baptist, and the messenger of Revelation –humans might have been chosen to convey the message of God. As such, this one now speaking to John – if indeed a human – next says, "and of your brethren."

Without being dogmatic, this tends to lean the entire thought of this messenger into the category of humanity. A heavenly angel could say this, but it appears he is saying that his servanthood is based on his humanity. Either way, he next says that the brethren (whether he is including himself in the term or not) are those "who have the testimony of Jesus."

Of these words, Vincent's Word Studies provides two possible options, saying, "Some explain as the testimony which proceeds from Jesus. Jesus, by imparting this testimony to believers imparts to them the spirit of prophecy. Others, the witness which is born to Jesus. The way of bearing this witness, the substance and essence of this testimony is the Spirit of prophecy."

These two options are then revealed in various ways in different translations –

who hold to the testimony of Jesus – NIV
who testify about their faith in Jesus – NLT
who rely on the testimony of Jesus – BSB
who tells about Jesus – CEV
who hold to the truth that Jesus revealed – GNT
who rely on what Jesus is saying – ISV
who have borne testimony to Jesus – WNT

Whichever of the two options is correct, the ultimate point of the messenger's words is that the message conveyed is one that is Christ-centered. As he is only a messenger and not the Lord, he exclaims, "Worship God!"

The words here clearly indicate that only God is to be worshiped. Any other being is created and is not God. Therefore, to worship anyone other than God is to fall into error. With that clearly and unambiguously stated, this messenger then finishes the verse with, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

What is being said here is not that there is only one purpose of prophecy, but that all prophecy is given to bear witness to the work of God in Christ. Every prophetic utterance in Scripture has a purpose, be it to foretell the future, to call the people back to a right relationship with God, to explain the dimensions of the building of the temple, or for whatever reason God determines.

However, each such prophetic utterance ultimately bears witness to the redemptive narrative which is focused and centered on Jesus. This may be typological, chronological, symbolical (such as in metaphor), and so on. But nothing that issues from God in prophecy will be stated unless it refers to and helps explain what He is doing in Christ. As such, no messenger of prophecy is to be worshiped unless that Messenger is Christ Himself. This is the point and purpose of what is conveyed to John.

Life application: This verse is one of the clearest indications of Jesus' deity in the Bible. And yet, in order to dismiss it, cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses need to misuse and

mistranslate what the Bible clearly teaches (they have their own translation of the Bible compiled with a set agenda against the Person of Jesus and who He is).

John, overwhelmed with the sight and concept of the marriage supper of the Lamb, falls at the feet of the messenger of the vision in order to worship him. But, in a clear and precise manner, he refuses the worship and redirects it towards Jesus. In the process of doing so, he proclaims, "Worship God!" In the Greek, as in the English, the "testimony of Jesus" brackets the state that God alone is to be worshiped.

What is implicit then is that Jesus is God. The angel states that he is only a fellow servant and one who bears the testimony of Jesus. It is this testimony that we are to direct our attention to, because that testimony is Christ-centered. Every word uttered in the Bible is either pointing to the coming Messiah or explaining and revealing Him.

Through the Bible's prophetic utterances, we learn that Jesus Christ is God's revelation of Himself. The Creator that we can't know – except for how He has revealed Himself through creation (general revelation) – becomes known and intimate through the Person of Jesus (specific revelation). Here is the logical progression of the idea –

1) We cannot specifically know God apart from the Person of Jesus Christ.
2) We cannot, at this time, know Jesus Christ apart from what is contained in Scripture.
3) Therefore, what is written in the Bible is intended to lead us to Jesus and thus to a proper knowledge of God.

Because the Bible's last book is entitled "Revelation," we can be certain that all we need to know for our life, doctrine, and practice has now been given. And because this book ends with the complete restoration of all that was lost at the beginning, then we have the full assurance that we have the whole counsel of God in its pages. Thus, there is no further prophecy necessary, and thus there are no more prophets who foretell the word of God.

This is vitally important to understand because heretics such as Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons, Mohammed of Islam, as well as a host of others throughout the ages, have proclaimed that they are prophets with a message from God. But these always lead away from Jesus, not towards Him, even if they proclaim Jesus in some sense.

God's word is sealed, the testimony of Jesus is given, and only this is to be considered in our knowledge of, and obedience to, God. Yes, the spirit of prophecy is – wholly and entirely – the testimony of JESUS!

Thank You, O God, for the beautiful revelation of Yourself through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and for the description of this revelation in the pages of Scripture. You have given us everything we need to pursue You, to know You, and to then turn to You in worship and praise. Great are You, O God! Amen.

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.
Revelation 19:11

With the vision of the great multitude in heaven complete, a new vision is brought to John's attention with the words, "Now I saw heaven opened." It is not unlike verse 4:1, which said, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven."

This time, instead of being called up to heaven as in 4:1, John views One that will be coming from heaven. As he looks up, he says, "and behold, a white horse." Many scholars attempt to tie the appearance of this horse in with the white horse found in Revelation 6:2. Other than the fact that both ride a white horse, there is nothing in common between the two.

The white horse is a symbol of military leadership. The rider, on the white horse in 6:2, represents a military leader during the tribulation period. The antichrist most likely. The white horse now is coming from heaven. It is Christ Jesus. This is then set as a contrast to Christ's first advent when He was completing His ministry. At that time, He rode on a donkey, symbolizing humility and peace. Now, He is coming as the conquering King. As it next says, "And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True."

These names are actually attributes ascribed to Him. Scripture is replete with references to the faithful nature of the Lord. For example, Psalm 89 says –

> "O LORD God of hosts,
> Who *is* mighty like You, O LORD?
> Your faithfulness also surrounds You." Psalm 89:8

The faithful nature of the Lord is one of His defining characteristics. Likewise, the truthfulness of the Lord is also on prominent display in Scripture –

> "For the word of the LORD *is* right,
> And all His work *is done* in truth." Psalm 33:4

Because these attributes define His very nature, what has been spoken by Him will come to pass. As His word says that there will be a time of peace on the earth where Israel will be chief among the nations, it will come to pass. When the Lord promises that He will always defend His people, even in their unfaithfulness to Him, it will come to pass.

Every word that the Lord speaks will be fulfilled, and many promises to Israel have been spoken. Therefore, they will come to pass. It is for this reason that the Lord will return as a conquering King. As the verse next says, "and in righteousness He judges and makes war." The next words of Psalm 33 (just cited) say –

> "He loves righteousness and justice;
> The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD." Psalm 33:5

Not only does the Lord judge and make war in righteousness, but Scripture states unambiguously that there is no unrighteousness in Him (see Psalm 92:15 and John 7:18). Therefore, His judgments and His war-making are based upon His righteousness. In other words, it would be unrighteous for Him to not do these things at the point in history when they come about.

The Lord has promised to keep Israel forever. He has promised that they will endure and that they will never be uprooted from the land again (see Amos 9:15). But there will be a time when Israel is facing complete annihilation. At that time, if the Lord does not intervene, they will be utterly wiped out. In this, His word (an extension of who He is) will have failed. Such cannot be. Therefore, He must judge and make war. This is seen in Daniel 12 –

> "Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who *was* above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that *it shall be* for a time, times, and half *a time;* and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these *things* shall be finished." Daniel 12:7

The deliverance of Judah and Jerusalem is prophesied in Zechariah 12 and 14 as well. Because these words have been spoken by the Lord, and because He is Faithful and True, He must intervene as He has proclaimed.

Life application: There are many words in Greek translated as “time” in the Bible, but there are two concepts of time that can be summed up by two specific words. The first is *chronos*, and it generally indicates the continuance of time; it is ongoing and indeterminate time. Think of a watch ticking (a chronometer counting time). We are living in this time, and it is moving ahead.

The second concept is *kairos*. It indicates a specific moment in recorded time which is set and identifiable. For you, the moment of your birth is a moment such as this. It is a memorable event because it only occurs once and records something special or historic. Americans would look at the attacks on Pearl Harbor or the Twin Towers as such moments. But such moments of universal importance permeate Scripture as well. A few are –

- The creation of the world
- The fall of man
- The flood of Noah
- The call of Abraham
- The giving of the Law at Mount Sinai
- The birth of Jesus Christ
- The crucifixion of the Lord
- The resurrection of Jesus Christ
- The ascension of Jesus Christ
- The coming of the Holy Spirit
- And (as we wait patiently) –
- The rapture of the church
- The literal, physical return of Jesus Christ

These moments have such great significance because they are key points of the redemptive narrative outlined in Scripture. Revelation 19:11 is the realization of the most anticipated event on earth. In fact, the largest font used in the publication of newspapers is known as the “second coming” font. It is reserved for the greatest moments in history. People have been waiting, watching, and either loving or hating the thought of this moment for over 2000 years. But despite the interval, it is a real moment that will really occur.

John looked and saw heaven opened. Jesus said that in the same manner as which He left, so He would also return. It will be visible and in a manner that anyone with their eyes directed upwards will behold. At exactly the right moment, He will return. The King is coming.

It is this moment that John sees when he beholds the white horse! As noted above, when Jesus came the first time, it was with humility and tenderness. He came as the Prince of Peace and the One to offer to His people, and by extension the whole world, a time of peace and righteousness. In demonstration of this, He humbly rode a donkey into Jerusalem. But His offer was rejected, and He was nailed to a cross. On the third day, He rose again. In His death, a New Covenant was introduced, and through His work, a new dispensation would result – the age of grace.

At the rapture, this age will end and there will be the seven years of tribulation which have been analyzed in detail – from Revelation 4:2 until Revelation 19:10. With Revelation 19:11 stated, there begins a new era in human history. Although there are still matters to be cleaned up, Jesus Christ has returned!

The Prince of Peace is now the Conquering King! As noted above, the descriptions of Him as "Faithful and True" are found throughout Scripture. A key verse, of which Revelation 19:11 is the fulfillment, is found in Psalm 96 –

> "For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth.
> He shall judge the world with righteousness,
> And the peoples with His truth." Psalm 96:13

This verse was speaking of the Lord (Yehovah). And yet, it is understood that John is applying it to the return of Jesus. It is yet another in the many continuous reminders that Jesus Christ is God. One cannot accept Jesus as nothing more than a "created being" and be considered a Christian – the two are mutually exclusive. He is the God/Man, and He is coming again to rule and judge in righteousness.

We must shun all false pictures and depictions of Jesus. When it is time for Him to act, He will do so. The time for Him to do so is closer each day. At a moment when the world is completely unprepared for it, He will come for His church. After that, the tribulation period will come about. And just as Israel is about to be annihilated, He will again act, coming to defend them and bring them into the New Covenant that they missed in His first advent. These events will happen. He is coming! He is Faithful and He is True. Hallelujah! He is JESUS!

We bow our knees to you, O Lord. You are the King of kings and the One who is coming again to rule in righteousness. Lord, help us to be faithful servants who will proclaim that You are angry at sin and that You are coming in all Your glory to judge the world in truth and righteousness. Great are You and You are greatly to be feared. And more, greatly are You to be praised! Amen.

His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. Revelation 19:12

The rider from heaven coming on a white horse, the Lord Jesus, is now described in more detail by John as he says, "His eyes *were* like a flame of fire."

This takes the reader back to verse 1:14, which said, "His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire." The eyes were then mentioned again in the letter to the church at Thyatira. In short, the idea of fire in the Bible is that of judgment, purification, refinement, and so on.

The eyes of Christ will burn through those who stand before Him, exposing all sin. They will get to the very heart of the rebellion of the people of the world just as He looked into the corrupt hearts of those in Thyatira. He will pierce deeply into the souls of all people because nothing in creation can be concealed before His piercing gaze.

As for believers, they will come before the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That which is of no value shall be burned away. The eyes of the Lord will pierce through the days of our lives and the actions of our conduct, and they will purify us for our eternal state.

For those who are not found in Christ, they will be judged with those same burning eyes. In their judgment, they will find eternal destruction. The difference between being in Christ or not being in Christ is one that will continue for all eternity after the judgment has been rendered.

Next, it says, "and on His head *were* many crowns." This is the third and last use of the word *diadéma* in Scripture. It was seen in Revelation 12:3 and in Revelation 13:1. Rather than a *stephanos*, or crown of victory, it is a royal crown. It is a kingly adornment for the head. The idea of many crowns comes with a title that will be stated in verse 19:16. He is the King of kings. All rule and authority ultimately belong to Him because every kingdom – in heaven and on earth – is under His authority.

This idea of wearing more than one crown goes back to Zechariah 6 where it says –

> "Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set *it* on the head
> of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. **12** Then speak to him, saying, 'Thus
> says the LORD of hosts, saying:
> "Behold, the Man whose name *is* the BRANCH!
> From His place He shall branch out,

And He shall build the temple of the LORD;
13 Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD.
He shall bear the glory,
And shall sit and rule on His throne;
So He shall be a priest on His throne,
And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.'" Zechariah 6:11-13

The "elaborate crown" set on the head of Joshua is actually plural "crowns." It is noting that he was symbolically filling two roles, that of both the king and the priest. These were offices that were not to be mixed under the law. The words thus prefigure the coming work of the Messiah where the offices would be united. In His return, there will not only be two crowns. Rather, there will be many crowns on His head. He is the King of kings, and the roles He fills are vast in number. On Him rests all rule, authority, and honor.

The verse finishes with, "He had a name written that no one knew except Himself." In the Bible, a name is more than just a type of "who" identification. It can also carry the significance of "why," "what," "where," "how," and even "when." It is an identification that provides a comprehensive understanding of the very nature of the being it represents.

Because Jesus has a name written on Himself that is known only to Him, it is identifying Him with I AM THAT I AM of Exodus 3:14. He is the self-existent One. He is the One prior to creation and the One who is upholding all creation by the power of His word. He is the eternal Word of God. No one knows the name except Himself because no one can know the name. It is beyond comprehension, it is beyond understanding, and it is marvelous in and of itself because it identifies that which is infinitely marvelous.

This is seen in an account found in Judges 13. The Angel of the Lord informed the parents of Samson that they would have a child. After the announcement, and prior to the Angel's departure, the account then says –

"Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, 'Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You.'
16 And the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, 'Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the LORD.' (For Manoah did not know He *was* the Angel of the LORD.)
17 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, 'What *is* Your name, that when Your words come *to pass* we may honor You?'

[18] And the Angel of the LORD said to him, 'Why do you ask My name, seeing it *is* wonderful?'" Judges 13:15-18

The word translated as "wonderful" is the adjective *peli*. It signifies something secret, wonderful, and incomprehensible. Its only other use is found Psalm 139:6 –

"*Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot *attain* it."

Just as David could not attain to the knowledge of the most high, mortal man cannot attain to the comprehension of the name of the Lord. These words of John clearly show that Jesus, the One being described in this vision, is the unsearchable God.

Life application: Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of every hope, every desire, and every need of the human soul because He is the Creator of man. Only in Him is found true peace and contentment. Those who have rejected Him as the avenue of reconciliation to God have not only brought condemnation upon themselves, but they have separated themselves from any hope of any contentment at all.

This is what we are to learn from the description of Him in this verse. The eyes like a flame of fire, the many crowns on His head, and the name written on Him that only He knows all shout out to us that Jesus Christ is God. Of His name, we will eternally move towards it, striving to know it without ever grasping its fullness. For those who reject Him, they will be eternally separated from that name and thus they will be eternally separated from the Source of the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" it represents. He is great. He is glorious. He is JESUS!

Lord Jesus, until Your return, You have blessed us with Your word. Its pages contain all that we need to know and understand in order to live our lives properly and grow in our knowledge of You. Fill us with Your Spirit, and open our eyes to its truths now in anticipation of the heavenly state when we will continue to learn about You for all eternity. Amen.

He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. Revelation 19:13

The marvelous depiction of Christ at His second coming continues to be described by John. The verse begins with, "He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood."

Of these words, there are two general thoughts on the meaning. The first is that it is referring to His crucifixion and the blood of that act. The second thought is that it is referring to the blood of His enemies. Based on the immediate context, that of judging and making war, it is probable that the second option is being referred to. In this, it fulfills the shocking Old Testament symbolism given by Isaiah –

> "Who *is* this who comes from Edom,
> With dyed garments from Bozrah,
> This *One who is* glorious in His apparel,
> Traveling in the greatness of His strength?—
> 'I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.'
> **2** Why *is* Your apparel red,
> And Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?
> **3** 'I have trodden the winepress alone,
> And from the peoples no one *was* with Me.
> For I have trodden them in My anger,
> And trampled them in My fury;
> Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments,
> And I have stained all My robes.
> **4** For the day of vengeance *is* in My heart,
> And the year of My redeemed has come.
> **5** I looked, but *there was* no one to help,
> And I wondered
> That *there was* no one to uphold;
> Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me;
> And My own fury, it sustained Me.
> **6** I have trodden down the peoples in My anger,
> Made them drunk in My fury,
> And brought down their strength to the earth.'" Isaiah 63:1-6

Isaiah's prophecy refers to the Lord's judgment in salvation. It is to be remembered that the focus of Revelation 4:2–19:10 has been the tribulation period, leading up to the Second Coming. It is during this time that the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy of "seventy sevens" takes place. Thus, the focus of attention is on the nation of Israel.

Jesus is returning to them in order to set up His millennial kingdom. As such, Isaiah's prophecy will be fulfilled. Israel has called on their Lord and He is responding – destroying her enemies and working salvation on their behalf. The symbolic nature of His garments being stained in the enemy's blood demonstrates that He has acted in order to rescue them.

The second clause of the verse next says, “and His name is called The Word of God.” This is the only time that this full expression of His name is given. Hebrews 4:12 uses the same wording, but that is referring to Scripture rather than Christ the Person.

Elsewhere, He is simply called “the Word” (John 1:1-14), or “the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). The writings of John have developed a picture of the nature and characteristics of Christ. This name, the Word of God, is not the same as that referenced in the previous verse where it said, “He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.” Rather, this is an explanation of that, just as the name provided in verse 19:16 will be an explanation of it.

One can explain something in part without knowing the fullness of what is being explained, and this is the idea here. The Word of God reveals to us a partial view of who Christ Jesus is. We can know that through the Word God made all things (John 1:2, Colossians 1:16). We can know that by the power of the Word all things are held together (Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3), and so on.

However, these explanations do not exhaust all of who He is because God is infinite. Because John has used the name “the Word of God” here, we are informed that everything about God is associated with who Christ Jesus is. The thing to be focused on is not so much the totality of what the name signifies, but why is the name stated here?

The answer is probably because God, who is revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures – and whose very nature states that He cannot lie – is expressing Himself through the Person of Jesus Christ to His people who had missed the significance of who He is in His first advent. The same Jesus who was crucified (and thus whose garments were at that time dipped in blood) is the same Jesus who is faithfully returning to defend those who rejected Him, once again dipping His garments in blood to demonstrate who He is – the fulfillment of the prophecies in their own Scriptures.

As He is the Word of God, He is their God because they were the stewards of the word of God, meaning Scripture. It is Scripture that presented Him. It is by Scripture that He is revealed. It is Scripture that prophesied of His coming. And it is Scripture which prophesies of His second coming. He is the Word of God.

<u>Life application:</u> The concept of Jesus returning to Israel permeates the Old Testament writings, and it is the fulfillment of Jesus’ own words, meaning that He will return when they call out to Him –

> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings, but you were not willing! **35** See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" Luke 13:34, 35

In having said this, He is Faithful and True to fulfill His promise. His robe will be dipped in the blood of His enemies when He comes to save His people because He is the Word of God.

The word which God speaks is revealed in and fulfilled by the Person of Jesus Christ. From the first sentence of the Bible, right to the last, Jesus Christ is the Word of God. He is the Creator, Redeemer, Savior, and Deliverer. He is our All in all.

As you read the Bible, the most relevant question you can ask is, "How does this point to Jesus?" Every book, every chapter, and every verse is written in order to show us God's plan of redemption in human history, and all of it can only be properly understood when viewed through the lens of God in Christ. He is the Word of God. He is JESUS.

Oh, God! How precious it is to read Your word and to discover Jesus everywhere we look. You have presented Your great love for us by sending Him to show us who You are and what You are like. And then You have given us your word to reveal Him to us! What a wonderful, magnificent story of love and hope. Hallelujah and Amen.

And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Revelation 19:14

The previous verse revealed the Lord returning in vengeance, symbolized by His robe being dipped in blood. The words now speak of those who will follow Him, saying, "And the armies in heaven."

There is debate as to who these are, but the words of Scripture elsewhere reveal that they are the saints. In other words, they are those who have been redeemed by the Messiah. When Christ returns, His redeemed will return with Him. That they are His saints is seen in the next words, saying, "clothed in fine linen, white and clean."

This speaks of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Those who have been cleansed and purified by Him are those who wear the white garments. This description has been seen several times in Revelation, such as in 3:4&5; 4:4; 6:11, 7:9; 7:13-17; & 19:8. The linen

has been seen on others in Revelation, but the description here appears particularly suited to those who have been purified by Christ. It is these who "followed Him on white horses."

The Greek is in the imperfect tense. It more specifically says, they "were following Him." In this, it gives the sense of an advancing movement of the armies. The white horses speak of rule and authority. Paul, writing to Timothy said –

> "If we endure,
> We shall also reign with Him." 2 Timothy 2:12

This is the thought of the white horses. Thus, the white horses go beyond the idea of victory (something assured in Christ), but they extend to ruling with Christ.

In the previous verse, Isaiah 63 was quoted where it said –

> "I have trodden the winepress alone,
> And from the peoples no one *was* with Me."

From this, it can be argued that Christ alone brings vengeance on the people and that those riding with Him have no part in the battle. But the symbolism of Isaiah and Revelation is just that. One cannot expect that Christ is literally stomping in a winepress. Rather, it is symbolism to speak of Him gaining the victory over His enemies.

Elsewhere, the Lord is said to gain the victory even though Israel participated in the battles where those claims are made (see Judges 20:25, for example). How the exact events will play out is unstated, and so only speculation can be given. Whether the Lord alone conducts the warfare, or whether His armies join in the battle is a matter that will be known at that time. For now, it is clear that the Lord ultimately is the Victor of what will occur.

<u>Life application:</u> The Bible is a book of progressive revelation. It doesn't arbitrarily introduce random thoughts that are key to the redemptive narrative. Things may come out of order at times, but the key points of the narrative will follow a logical introduction, development, and progression to what is presented. Understanding this helps us to make right decisions about important concepts. A very good example is from Genesis 6 which speaks of the "sons of God."

In Genesis 6:2, it says that "that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they *were* beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose." There are

various opinions as to who these "sons of God" are – the sons of Adam through Seth who remained faithful to the Lord, angels, aliens, etc. A poor analysis will lead to the wrong conclusion. In other words, one must look at the progressive nature of God's revelation to understand that it is, in fact, actual humans, not angels or other beings.

Nothing concerning angels had been introduced into the narrative, and specific points in the narrative that had already been provided were given as clues to who these "sons of God" were. Later passages in the Bible then confirm what is said in Genesis 6.

This is important to understand because it bears directly on this verse in Revelation. Who are the "armies in heaven" that are following Jesus? The answer is often given as "angels." This is an incorrect analysis because the very context and progression of the book of Revelation (and of passages given earlier in Scripture) shows us who it is. It is the redeemed of the Lord already described in preceding verses. This is why this progression of thought has been given.

In Revelation 4:1, the rapture of the church occurred. From 4:2 until 19:13, the church has been out of the picture, except as they are noted with Jesus, in heaven, not on earth. The intervening verses where earthly visions have been revealed have referred to the tribulation, the final seven-year period of Daniel's "seventy weeks" noted in Daniel 9. This seven-year period has now ended, and Christ is returning to set up His millennial kingdom. And it is the bride of the Lamb who is returning with Him.

Others have been noted as receiving white garments during the tribulation, and their state has been explained to some extent, and it will continue to be explained later as well (such as in Revelation 20:4).

This verse says these armies are clothed in fine linen, white and clean. Such are garments of righteousness mentioned in the preceding verses of Revelation. Another point concerning those coming with Christ is what was noted in chapter 17. The ten kings of the end-times empire are said to wage war with the Lamb. This isn't possible until the Lamb actually returns which is now being stated in Chapter 19.

When they fight against the Lamb, it notes this in 17:14 – "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those *who are* with Him *are* called, chosen, and faithful." Thus, it is clear that these are believers in, and followers of, Jesus – not angels.

And as added support, we read this from the hand of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 – "Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds

to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." Although this doesn't mean that all believers will be with the Lord at all times and forever, as if we are sitting in a room together. However, if we "shall always be with the Lord," then it seems clear that this includes following Him to His glorious victory.

When we return with Him, we will also be riding on white horses. Thus, we are sharing in His victory as those who reign with Him. This in no way diminishes the victory as His alone, but rather glorifies it. As Paul writes in Romans 8:37 – "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

It brings both honor and glory to Jesus for His saints to return with Him in this capacity because it is noting that He is the One who stood in victory over our sinful state, cleansing us and bringing us near to God through the purifying power of His shed blood. This is the reward and honor of being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ – sharing in His victory and glory. Hallelujah to the Lamb! Hallelujah to JESUS!

Lord God, help us to properly look into your word and to evaluate it as it is presented. Help us to not come to unfounded conclusions because of what we want to believe, but rather lead us to make logical conclusions based on what You have presented. You are the God of order, and Your word reflects this. Thank You for the beautiful words of life it presents to us. Amen.

Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. Revelation 19:15

The narrative now continues to describe the rider dressed in white mentioned in the previous verses. The description says, "Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword." This is the same description given in verse 1:16 –

> "He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength."

To get a fuller understanding of the symbolism, refer back to that commentary. In short, the sword proceeding from His mouth gives the sense that Christ will cut out all that is false and all that is contrary to the truth. Of the sword, it next says, "that with it He should strike the nations." This was alluded to in Isaiah 11:4 –

> "But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
> And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;

He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked."

Such terminology is found elsewhere in the Old Testament and earlier in Revelation as well (for example, see Revelation 2:27). Continuing on, John prophesies about Christ's coming rule, saying, "And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron."

The words are emphatic. It is Christ, and He alone, who will ultimately rule the nations. Though the millennium will be a time of great wonder in comparison to our current age, it does not mean that there will be only peace and harmony without any disobedience. This is understood from passages such as Zechariah 14 –

> "And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. **17** And it shall be *that* whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. **18** If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they *shall have* no *rain;* they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. **19** This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."
>
> -Zechariah 14:16-19

Hence, there will be a need for the rod of iron spoken of. As such, the specific prophecy concerning this time was made in the second psalm –

> "I will declare the decree:
> The LORD has said to Me,
> 'You *are* My Son,
> Today I have begotten You.
> **8** Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
> The nations *for* Your inheritance,
> And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.
> **9** You shall break them with a rod of iron;
> You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'" Psalm 2:7-9

Continuing on, John next says, "He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

The treading of the winepress was referred to in Revelation 14. That symbolism is brought in again here, and it is reflective of the words of Isaiah 63:3. It is Christ who pours out the anger of God on the disobedient. The fact that "the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" is mentioned shows how repulsive sin is to the Creator.

He has made His goodness and His perfect nature manifest to the people of the world, but that has been openly rejected and actively worked against in our wickedness. Christ is the One who will trample out this disobedience, and who will maintain harmony during the millennial reign.

Despite His rule and despite the ideal conditions of the world in which man lives, the wickedness of man's heart will be shown to have been unchanged. From the fall, through the various dispensations, and into the millennium, the depravity of the human heart and man's desperate need for Jesus Christ is on full display.

Life application: The right to rule the nations belongs to Jesus, the right to judge those nations belongs to Jesus, and therefore the right to destroy the ungodly nations belongs to Jesus as well. God is a God of mercy and longsuffering, but His patience has an end. It was true when He destroyed the world in the flood. It was true when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. It was true when He used Israel to destroy the nations of Canaan. And it was also true when He turned His judgment on Israel after continuous disobedience.

The world of today has all but rejected Him and, in due time, He will come for His faithful at the rapture. After this, the events which have unfolded thus far in Revelation will come to pass. But instead of humble repentance, the world will only turn further away from Him. And so, He will come in His glory with His faithful believers to be glorified in them at His return. He will be glorified in the eyes of His followers in how He judges, and He will be glorified in those He judges through their destruction.

The word of God, the Holy Bible, is likened to a sharp two-edged sword in Hebrews 4:12. If this is the proper symbolism to be taken, then Jesus will merely speak and by the breath of His mouth He will strike the nations. Paul appears to indicate just this in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 –

> "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."

The very Word which the nations have rejected will become the implement of their destruction.

The saying “to whom much is given, much will be expected” rings true. The Bible is the most published book in all of human history, and its pages fill the homes of the world, even the unbelieving world. With the internet today, any person can access, read, and study it. In it is sure proof of the infallible word of God. Therefore, to reject it is to reject the God who gave it.

This powerful word will be spoken by Jesus and the nations will fall. During and after His return, “He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron.” The shepherd carries an iron rod to beat attacking animals and thus protect His sheep. And so, Christ will shepherd His people in safety. It is His world, and He is the Defender of His flock. No accusation of unfairness will hold when He judges, and the world will submit to His judgment and rule.

It is important to remember here that Jesus is returning to the land and the people of Israel. The world will have come against them, and it is this antagonistic world to which His rod is directed. Thus, in a sweeping display of judgment, we read the words of the subject verse.

The gentle, humble, and loving Creator and Savior has become the Executor of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. The world that now mocks Jesus, and finds Him either a joke or a cosmic pushover, will stand in horror as He personally destroys all wickedness and roots out everything that causes evil. This is the great, awesome, and splendid God who deserves all of our praise, honor, and respect.

We can give it to Him now, or we can stand condemned for rejecting His gracious offer of peace which came at the cross of Calvary. I choose life… I choose JESUS.

O God! How glorious You are and how splendid is Your message of peace to the people of the world. Surely, no one has any right to cry “Unfair” when You come to judge them for rejecting You. We can only avow that Your way is right and that in faithfulness and righteousness You make every decision. Hallelujah to You! Amen.

And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written:
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Revelation 19:16

The description of Christ Jesus in His glorious return at the second coming continues in this verse. John, beholding the apocalyptic scene, says of Him, “And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written.”

In verse 19:12, it said, “He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.” In verse 19:13, it then said, “and His name is called the Word of God.” Each of these thoughts is given to express a truth about Christ Jesus.

He has a name that no one knows, expressing that it is impossible to grasp its meaning. His name is called the Word of God to reveal that He is the One who conveys to us the meaning and expression of who God is. Now, a name will be provided that will express one of the many positions He fills. The name to be given is thus a title.

The name is written upon the robe to designate His position of authority in a manner that is evident for all to see. The words “and on His thigh” could mean one of various things:

1) It could mean that the name is written on the robe, and it is also written on the thigh.
2) It might mean it is written partly on the robe and partly on the thigh.
3) Or, what seems likely is that the word “and” is signifying “even.” In this, it would translate as “He has on *His* robe, even on His thigh.”

With the third option, the NLT states it more obviously as “On his robe at his thigh.” The ISV states it, saying, “On his robe that covers his thigh he has a name written.”

Until that time comes, we can only speculate, but the context of who Jesus is and what is being symbolized should be considered carefully. Jesus is a Jew. He was born a Jew, He lived as a Jew, and He has promised (in both testaments of the Bible) that He will return to His brothers, the Jewish people. From His own mouth –

> “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! **38** See! Your house is left to you desolate; **39** for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” Matthew 23:37-39

It is when Israel as a nation calls on Jesus as Lord (Jerusalem – symbolizing the seat of power for the nation) that He will return. This is spoken of, as noted, throughout the prophetic books of the Old Testament as well. The Church Age has occurred during the time of His rejection by the nation of Israel (see Romans 11:25, 26). But when they call on Him, at that time “all Israel will be saved.”

At some point, the rapture of the church will occur. This will be followed by the seven years of tribulation on earth. At the end of this period, the nation of Israel will be facing annihilation and will come to their senses, calling out to Him. When they do, He will return, with the church following Him, to rescue His people (take time to read Zechariah 12-14).

Understanding this context, it can now be more easily perceived what His appearance will be like. He will be dressed in traditional Jewish garments, recognizable to His people. These garments include a tassel on their corner which is mandated in the Law of Moses –

> "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. **39** And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you *may* not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, **40** and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. **41** I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I *am* the LORD your God." Numbers 15:38-41

The tassel is known as a *tzitzit* (also known as a *gedil* in Deuteronomy 22:12). It was mandated to be worn, as it says in Numbers 15, to "remember and do" all the commandments of the Lord. When Christ ministered to Israel, it is this part of the garment that the people reached for in order to be healed. For example –

> "And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. **21** For she said to herself, 'If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.' **22** But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, 'Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour.'" Matthew 9:20-22

> "When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. **35** And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, **36** and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched *it* were made perfectly well." Matthew 14:34-36

These and other references are certainly based on what was said in Malachi 4:2 –

"For behold, the day is coming,
Burning like an oven,
And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.
And the day which is coming shall burn them up,"
Says the LORD of hosts,
"That will leave them neither root nor branch.
2 But to you who fear My name
The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
With healing in His wings;
And you shall go out
And grow fat like stall-fed calves." Malachi 4:1, 2

The words, "With healing in His wings," are referring to the extremities of His garments (the wings) where the tassels are located. The tassel of the Messiah is an identification of who He is and the authority He possessed. This is why the people sought to touch this tassel. The tassel was given as an anticipatory picture of the coming Messiah who would fulfill the law and take the burdens of man from them.

When Christ Jesus returns, the name on His robe is symbolized by His tassels. Being on His robe, it will rest upon His thigh while He sits upon His horse. The tassel of the Messiah will reveal His name, meaning His title –

KING OF KINGS AND
LORD OF LORDS.

In Revelation 17:14, it reversed these words saying, "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings." The inversion of the words here in Chapter 19 is probably given to highlight His kingship – the white horse, the many crowns, and so on. There are "kings," but there is one "KING." Thus, John places this designation first.

<u>Life application:</u> Understanding the symbolism of Revelation calls for a full knowledge of the symbolism of the Old Testament. The innumerable references from the Old Testament come alive when the connections are made. Importantly, the Jewish nature of who Christ is, and the interactions He has made (and that are yet ahead) with His people cannot be dismissed without having a faulty view of the redemptive narrative.

In Jeremiah 31, it is clear that the New Covenant was made with Israel and Judah –

> "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Jeremiah 31:31

As such, Gentiles are brought into what has been established already. They do not replace Israel and Judah. Rather, Israel and Judah are the entities with whom the covenant is made, and in whom it will someday be fully realized (see citation from Matthew 23:37-39 above). Paul deals with this in His epistles, clearly demonstrating that the people of Israel will someday be brought into the covenant after the time of the Gentiles is complete.

At that time, they will recognize Him as *Melekh melekhim, Adonai adoniim* or "King of kings and Lord of lords." The tassel on His robe, which will be draped over His thigh as He sits on His horse, will be the identifying mark of this exalted name. This is the symbolism we are to infer from what John presents.

Jesus, the King of the Jews, is also King of all kings and Lord of all lords. He will reign in the midst of His people Israel and His law will go forth from Jerusalem. The church has often missed this fact, but it doesn't change the truth of what lies ahead.

The Gentile-led church age will end and then the events of Revelation will come to pass. For now, this dispensation is a steppingstone that has come about during the time of punishment for disobedience upon the nation of Israel. That time is almost over. They are back in the land, and they will soon be brought through the fire of tribulation in preparation for the glorious return of their rightful King – JESUS!

Glorious Lord Jesus – You are ever-faithful to us, even when we turn from You. Your promises to Israel are from everlasting to everlasting and You will never forsake Your covenant with them! Thank You for being so faithful to them and to Your church. We fail You, but You forgive. We turn from You, but You remain faithful! Praises to You! Amen.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, Revelation 19:17

With the vision of Christ returning on the horse to wage war against the multitudes gathered together, John next says, "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun."

The Greek reads "one angel." The Amplified Bible gives a notable translation, highlighting the fact – "Then I saw a single angel standing in the sun." Young's literally translates it as, "And I saw one messenger standing in the sun."

There is much conjecture, but no definitive answer, as to who this messenger is. It appears, however, that it is another revelation of the Lord Jesus. When Paul was called to his commission, it says –

> "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, **13** at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me." Acts 26:12, 13

In other words, the messenger (angel) here in Revelation is standing in the sun, and yet he can be beheld despite the brightness of the sun, meaning He is brighter than the sun itself. This is the same thought that is given in Acts. Right at the point when the sun is the brightest (midday), Paul beheld an even brighter light. The radiance of the Lord outshines this brightest orb of creation. In this dazzling manner, it next says, "and he cried with a loud voice."

In this, the 19th Chapter of Revelation corresponds to the 19th letter of the Hebrew Aleph-beth. The 19th letter is *qoph*. It is pictured as a sun on the horizon and carries the meaning of "condense," "circle," and "time." Qoph is the first letter of *qara* – to cry out. Verse 19:17 speaks of the angel standing in the sun and crying out with a loud voice. In this loud voice, the Creator – our Lord Jesus – prepares His creatures for what lies ahead, "saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven..."

It is the Lord who directs creation (Psalm 104, for example). He calls out, fixing their appointed times, and He directs their movements with His wisdom. Now, because of the great battle that lies ahead, He alerts them to what is about to happen, saying, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God."

This doesn't mean that the Lord is literally gathering birds together in advance of the warfare to come. Rather, it means that when the warfare to be described comes, the birds will be found at the scene which will occur. Exactly what lies ahead will be described in the coming verses.

<u>Life application:</u> The cry of this angel goes right back to Genesis 1 and shows that God is the Creator of these things and that they are at His direction even after creation –

> "Then God said, 'Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.' **21** So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves,

with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good." Genesis 1:20, 21

The Creator sets all things in place to accomplish His will, even what birds are needed to clean up the refuse that lays exposed upon the ground. What is to be described are gruesome details that are set in stark contrast to the marriage supper of the Lamb – where the redeemed will dine in purity, holiness, and in the presence of the God of redemption. On the other hand, the people involved in this supper *will be* the supper – it will be a feast of death and horror.

The terminology for the call to this meal is similar to one given in Ezekiel 39 at the battle of Gog and Magog and surely builds upon that symbolism. A time of death and corruption lays ahead for all those armies who are to come against God's chosen people. It is better by far to realize now what God is doing in human history and stand aligned with Him and His purposes. To take an alternate course is tantamount to signing up to be an unfortunate participant in a banquet of death.

Come to God through His provision. Be reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, and you will never face the horror of being eternally separated from Him. He has made the offer, and He will see you through to a blessed state where we will forever live in His glorious presence. Call out to Him today. Call upon the name of the Lord – JESUS!

O God, You have shown us what is right. You have given us advanced warning as to the consequences for not following that path. We pray for the people of the world. May Your word go out and touch many lives. May their hearts be receptive to its message and convert them now, before the terrible time of tribulation and suffering comes. We pray this so that You will be glorified in them. Amen.

that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great." Revelation 19:18

The words here are part of one long thought. Taken with the previous verse, they read –

"Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, **18** that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people,* free and slave, both small and great.'"

With the context given, this verse begins with, “that you may eat the flesh of kings.” These would be the kings previously mentioned in Revelation 16:14 –

> “For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”

These kings will now become the main course of a banquet for the vultures to dine on. Next is mentioned, “the flesh of captains.”

The Greek word, *chiliarchos*, is now used for the twenty-second and last time in the Bible. It signifies one who commands a thousand men. In modern terms, it might be equal to someone around the rank of full bird colonel. For the continued feast of the ravenous birds, these will add supplemental nutrition. But there is more to come. It next mentions “the flesh of mighty men.”

The *ischuros*, or “mighty,” are mentioned now for the last of twenty-nine times. It signifies those who have combative strength. Their flesh will be lean and delicious to the birds gathered for a meal. Along with them would be “the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them.”

These are the cavalry. Though modern cavalries have tanks and the like, it can be expected that there will be real animals brought to the battle as well. The horses will be fit and fighting ready, and their riders will be strong men of war. They will fall in battle though, and they will be another part of the great banquet set forth for the ever-increasing number of birds that join the feast. Finally, it mentions “the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great.”

This includes all others who were caught up in the battle – the free and slaves, the nurses and corpsmen, civilian contractors and civilian bystanders, and so on. The numbers will be immense and the bounty for the birds will seem endless. The small and great alike will become a feast exposed to the open skies of the Middle East. The words are not unlike those of Ezekiel 39 and the great battle of Gog and Magog –

> “And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field:
> ‘Assemble yourselves and come;
> Gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal
> Which I am sacrificing for you,
> A great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel,

That you may eat flesh and drink blood.
18 You shall eat the flesh of the mighty,
Drink the blood of the princes of the earth,
Of rams and lambs,
Of goats and bulls,
All of them fatlings of Bashan.
19 You shall eat fat till you are full,
And drink blood till you are drunk,
At My sacrificial meal
Which I am sacrificing for you.
20 You shall be filled at My table
With horses and riders,
With mighty men
And with all the men of war,' says the Lord GOD." Ezekiel 39:17-20

Life application: Unlike the marriage supper of the Lamb where people will dine with the Lord, in this coming supper the people will be the main course.

Battles are times of death and corruption. They are a time when the hungry pit fills with the slain. And they are a time when the beasts of the earth dine on what is left of those who died in the encounter. As horrific as these end-times prophecies are, they are a self-inflicted event upon the masses who are destroyed. God has given us His word in the pages of the Bible, and He has shown us the choices we can make – life or death, Jesus or the devil, to participate in the marriage supper with the Lamb or to be the "supper of the great God."

Because the word is already written, anyone can simply open the book and decide what they will do with Jesus Christ – enjoy Him as their Savior now and their Lord for all eternity, or live apart from Him now and be separated from His goodness forever. And the list is comprehensive. God is no respecter of persons. Status and position will mean nothing when He comes to judge in righteousness. All are alike to Him, be it captains, mighty men, horses and those who sit on them, and all other people – free and slave, and small and great.

Because this is true, the opposite is also true. No matter how lowly you are in this world, you are on an equal footing with all others in Christ. He is pleased to look upon you apart from your worldly status and call you His own. Make the right choice – choose JESUS!

Lord, when we feel down and lowly, all we need to do is to consider that You went to the cross for us. Because this is true, we can certainly know that nothing can separate us from Your love. And nothing in all the world is more important than our relationship with You. You, Jesus, are our All in all, and You are our great desire. Glory, majesty, and praises belong to You alone. Amen.

And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Revelation 19:19

The "supper of the great God," meaning the great banquet of the birds proclaimed in the previous two verses, has been prophesied. Now the battle that precedes that supper begins to be described. John says, "And I saw the beast."

This is most probably referring to the beast out of the sea that started to be described in verse 13:1. John next refers to "the kings of the earth, and their armies." This is referring to those just mentioned in the previous verse, noted as "the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great."

This great coalition of people, united in battle array, has come into the Valley of Armageddon. It is "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" mentioned in verse 16:14. Of this vast hoard, John says they are "gathered together."

Something has brought all the nations of this great coalition together into the land of Israel. It could be a vast amount of oil or other natural resources, a desire to simply exterminate the Jews once and for all, or for whatever reason. They have been brought into this tiny sliver of land to make war there. Because this is so, and because the Lord has covenanted with Israel to defend them, they are not only threatening Israel, but their actions are implicitly an attack against the Lord. Thus, they have come "to make war against Him who sat on the horse."

Though not included in translations, there is an article before "war." It is "to make the war against Him who sat on the horse." Of this, the Pulpit Commentary says, "viz. that war which is perpetually waged between the powers of light and darkness, and which will not be terminated until the great judgment." This appears to be a sound analysis. There is a war coming that will be the culmination of a war that has been waged since the beginning.

It is an ongoing battle that has been conducted while God has allowed the various dispensations to run their course. As Israel is a central part of the redemptive narrative,

and as they are now threatened with total annihilation, the Lord will personally intervene in order to keep His covenant promises. The Messiah is returning to set things right. The armies arrayed against Israel are actually arrayed against Him, "and against His army."

These are the saints, "the armies in heaven," mentioned in verse 19:14. They will accompany the Lord as He returns to earth to bring His judgment upon this great force arrayed in the land of Israel.

Life application: This is one of those surprising verses that pops up and can be read over quickly, but if one thinks it through, it is rather hard to fathom. Jesus Christ promised to return two thousand years ago, and this has been the proclamation and call of faithful Christians since then.

The Lord's Supper taken by the faithful is a proclamation of this fact. Paul says that in taking it, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The words, "till He comes," are to be a constant reminder that He is coming again.

It is understood by anyone who has heard about Christianity that they believe Christ is returning. Further, although less known and often misunderstood, is the concept of the rapture of the church. It will happen. When it does, it will take a "strong delusion" to keep people from realizing the significance of it. But, at the end of the tribulation period, Jesus will come – openly and visibly. And with Him will be the armies in heaven.

The premise of secular humanism, false religions, and many Christian denominations, is that the world is moving forward toward peace and stability. A wrongly held view by many Christians is that the church is going to continue to grow and overcome the evil in the world until we have "ushered in" the kingdom age. It is supposed that when we have done this, Christ will then return, and all will be a state of happiness that permeates the world. But the Bible clearly teaches that this is wrong.

The world will continue to get more divided and aggressive against moral goodness, not the opposite. In the end, it will be a place of such desperate wickedness that very little will be left except destruction, disease, famine, and war. At this point, after seven horrifying years of upheaval, Jesus will return at the time of the great battle spoken of here in Revelation.

Little does the world know that the Lord isn't just a tame Lamb, but He is also a great Warrior. He will return to slay the enemies and usher in a time of wonder and delight on the earth. He is great. He is glorious. He is JESUS.

Lord God, we only delude ourselves if we think that anything good can come of our fallen state. Without You and Your Spirit upon us, we are at war with goodness, and we are headed for destruction. Help us to understand that only through You comes true peace and harmony. Help us to share the message of restoration found in Jesus! Amen.

Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. Revelation 19:20

In the battle where the armies are gathered together to make war against Christ and His army, it now says, "Then the beast was captured." The beast is the beast out of the sea of Revelation 13:1. As this beast is an entity headed by the antichrist which had heads of governmental authority and leaders of those governments, it could be that "the beast" is only speaking of the antichrist who heads the entity, or it could be referring to him and all the leaders with him. Translations vary because of this. Some say, "with him," while some say, "with this," or "with it."

If this is only referring to the antichrist, a hint of his demise may be found in Isaiah 14 –

> "All the kings of the nations,
> All of them, sleep in glory,
> Everyone in his own house;
> **19** But you are cast out of your grave
> Like an abominable branch,
> *Like* the garment of those who are slain,
> Thrust through with a sword,
> Who go down to the stones of the pit,
> Like a corpse trodden underfoot.
> **20** You will not be joined with them in burial,
> Because you have destroyed your land
> *And* slain your people." Isaiah 14:18-20

To be "cast out of your grave" is explained by the words, "You will not be joined with them in burial." In other words, rather than dying and going to the grave, a different fate awaits him. This is mere speculation, but it is still worthy of note.

Whatever is being referred to will be understood when the time comes. For now, it continues by saying, “and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence.” This is now the beast out of the sea first mentioned in Revelation 13:11. To see the connection, the relevant verses can be placed side by side –

> “He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. **14** And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. **15** He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” Revelation 13:13, 14

> “Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.” Revelation 19:20

As noted in Chapter 13, this false prophet is said to have performed “great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.” It is with these signs “by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast.” Those who followed them willingly gave their full allegiance to them, acknowledging them as their supreme authority, and thus rejecting the Lord Jesus. In receiving the mark, they have rejected any chance of salvation, as is implied in Revelation 20:4. Of those taking the mark, it next says, “and those who worshiped his image.”

The verb is a present participle. It more rightly reads, “and those worshiping his image.” This is not a separate category, but the same group. They received the mark of the beast (a single event), and they actively and continually gave their devotion after that (an ongoing process of worship). This tells us that those who received the mark did so willingly. There was nothing forced about it, and it could be rejected. If some are to be given the mark involuntarily (of which the Bible says nothing), it could not be held against them because it is not followed up with the act of worship.

As far as the beast and the false prophet, the verse finishes with, “These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.” Whether these words speak of only two people (the leaders of the entities) or of many, the beast and the false prophet will be chucked directly into *limnēn tou pyros*, or “lake the fire,” where they will have an eternal swim. The consequences of their actions will be regretted forever and ever. Such is the nature of exalting oneself above the offer of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who

come humbly before Him, acknowledging themselves as sinners in need of a Savior, will receive the grace and mercy of a tender and loving Creator. Those who fail to do so will receive their just due, even as the beast and the false prophet.

Life application: The false power, signs, and lying wonders mentioned by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2 and here in Revelation will lead many to take the mark of the beast and to worship the image of the beast. These words are not just a fairy tale, but they rather convey the truth of God's word. The world is really heading in this direction, and when that day comes the people will rather believe a lie than the truth.

When a person takes the mark of the beast, his eternal fate will be secured. He will go to the same terrifying and everlasting doom which is the Lake of Fire. For now, in Revelation 19, it is the beast and the false prophet who are heading there. Their judgment will be immediate, and their punishment won't be delayed.

The world will see the power and awesome display of righteous judgment when the Lord comes to accomplish His work by weeding out these miscreants and robbers of souls. Terrible times are ahead. However, after the time of terror, the Lord will reign in righteousness. Thank God for seeing things through to their completion. And thank God for sending His Son to make it possible. Praise God for JESUS!

Heavenly Father, we look to You now and thank You for sending us Your Son. The book of Revelation shows that many will be cast into the Lake of Fire, but the Bible implies that this terrifying place is what we all rightfully deserve. And yet, because of Your great love and mercy, You have given us Jesus to lead us back to You. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.

And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh. Revelation 19:21

The armies were said to be gathered together in verse 19. In verse 20, the description of how the beast and the false prophet were dealt with was provided. Only now are the details of how the armies are to be dealt with provided. John describes what he sees, saying, "And the rest."

This is stated in order to set the armies off from the beast and the false prophet. It does not negate their guilt (they obviously bore the mark of the beast), but their judgment will come later when the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11 takes place. Of these, John says they "were killed with the sword."

This seems like a general term, meaning they were killed in battle and the sword was the implement used to kill each person. Such is seen countless times in Scripture. Ezekiel 32 is loaded with such descriptions, such as –

> "Assyria *is* there, and all her company,
> With their graves all around her,
> All of them slain, fallen by the sword.
> **23** Her graves are set in the recesses of the Pit,
> And her company is all around her grave,
> All of them slain, fallen by the sword,
> Who caused terror in the land of the living." Ezekiel 32:22, 23

Proceeding on with John's words, however, "the sword" takes on a different meaning, as he says, "which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse."

The meaning here is probably as simple as saying, "the armies were destroyed by the Lord merely speaking the word." The command goes forth and it happens. This would be comparable to Jesus speaking the words, "Lazarus, come forth." When He spoke, the event occurred.

Or it could be that the Lord gives a command, and His armies complete the task according to that command. Commentaries that dogmatically state that the armies with Christ have no part in the battle, even going so far as stating that nothing is said about them bearing swords, are useless. Such is an argument from silence. What is certain is that the armies will be defeated.

Of this, the Pulpit Commentary says, "Spiritual death is inflicted upon those who have proved themselves hostile to God." This is incorrect and must be corrected. Spiritual death is the default state of all humans from conception. This is because of inherited sin. All people are born in sin, all people are spiritually disconnected from God, and all who die without being born again will be condemned. This is stated by Jesus, explicitly, in John 3:18 –

> "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

What occurs in this passage with these armies is the ending of their physical life. As they were never born again, their condemnation remains, and they will be sentenced to the

Lake of Fire at the final judgment. As for their dead physical bodies, John finishes the verse and the chapter saying, “And all the birds were filled with their flesh.”

It is the banquet anticipated in verse 19:17. The indignity of being openly exposed and then consumed by the birds is the final lot for the hordes of soldiers that joined with the beast and the false prophet. It is a revolting end to their existence that will be followed by a horrifying judgment when that time comes.

Life application: These armies had joined with the kings of the earth to form the forces who have threatened to annihilate the people of the nation of Israel. We know this from the writings of the prophets, such as Zechariah chapters 12-14. Other Old Testament references reveal various details. It can also be discerned from Jesus’ own words in Matthew 24:27-31 –

> ‘For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. **28** For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.
> **29** “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30** Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **31** And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”
>
> -Matthew 24:27-31

He is returning to Israel after their time of refinement through the fire of the tribulation. Of the armies arrayed against Him, they have already heard and rejected the gospel which was proclaimed “to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” as is recorded in Revelation 14:6, and therefore there will be no mercy for these unrepentant people.

The sword of Jesus’ mouth is the very word which spoke the universe into existence, which proclaimed peace through the plan of redemption of man, and which cried out in agony on the cross. God has done all these things and they have been rejected. The sentence will be completely just, and it will be carried out swiftly and with finality. And thus, all the birds that have been called together for the supper of the great God will be filled with the flesh of these people.

The offer of peace has been made to the world. Be sure to receive it before it is too late. No person knows the moment of his death. So, call out to God now for restoration. Call out to God for salvation through JESUS.

Glorious God – You are righteous, and You are just. We know that You will come to judge the world, and it will be completely fair when the sentences are pronounced. No one will be able to say that they weren't deserving of what comes upon them. And so, we ask now for You to use us to spread Your message of peace before that time of condemnation comes. Amen.

CHAPTER 20

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. Revelation 20:1

With the introduction of Chapter 20, a new vision is also introduced. John begins it by saying, "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven." There is no reason to assume that this is not the Lord. He is coming down from heaven with a set purpose. As such, it is another aspect of the many roles of what Christ has come to do. Just as heaven opened and He came riding on a white horse in verse 19:11 in order to fulfill His role as the returning Lord and the conquering King, here, (assuming it is the Lord) He is coming down from heaven "having the key to the bottomless pit."

The Lord is the One who has final authority over the bottomless pit. In Revelation 9:1, it said John saw "a star fallen from heaven to earth." He then noted that "to him was given the key to the bottomless pit." Being given a key means another gave him the key. Nothing is said about that now. Thus, the key is already in the possession of this angel. Along with the key, it says, "and a great chain in his hand."

The Greek reads "upon his hand." It signifies that in His hand rests the authority of binding with this chain. What will be done with it demonstrates that this is most probably Christ Jesus who bears it. Without taking the symbolism too far, one can almost imagine it is as if the chain is held upon His hand and, without words, hinting, "Here is the implement of your confinement, and it is I who have the authority to use it to bind you."

Life application: So far, the bottomless pit has been mentioned in Chapter 9 in connection with locusts which were sent to harm men and who had over them the destroyer – Abaddon (Apollyon). It was also noted in Chapter 11 when speaking of the beast that would come from it and kill the two witnesses. Finally, the bottomless pit was mentioned in 17:8, again referring to the beast that would come out of it.

This pit, or abyss, then is not the place of final destruction, but a place which is under God's control to which, or from which, these evil beings are directed to meet God's sovereign plans for humanity. As He directs, these beings follow that direction. This is a good lesson for readers of the Bible to understand, and it is one that is also understood from the book of Job.

There is no wickedness, evil, or producer of evil that can thwart God's plan. Anything which occurs does so to meet God's overall good purposes and He is in control of all things. If we can truly grasp this and believe it, then no matter what happens, we know that it is being worked out for our good and for God's glory. This should be an immensely comforting thought for us as we walk in a world that often contains difficulties, trials, and sadness. God is in control, and He has His great hand upon you – even when it doesn't seem so.

Be of good cheer, God has your back. He has proved it through the redemptive narrative, and it is summed up in the incarnation. Everything ultimately points to what God is doing through His Son, JESUS!

What a great comfort it is to know that You truly are in control. Despite the evil that surrounds us, the troubles that come our way, the terrible choices our leaders make, and also in the forces of evil that constantly try to mislead us, You are still there taking care of us and tending to us. You are working it all out for our good. You are great, O God! Amen.

He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; Revelation 20:2

The angel who came out of heaven who has the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain upon his hand now takes specific action against the ancient foe of man. John says, "He laid hold of the dragon." This is the dragon introduced with this name in Revelation 12:3. This is the last time this epitaph will be used in the Bible. Vincent's Word Studies notes, "The word is commonly derived from ἔδρακον, the second aorist tense of δέρκομαι to see clearly, in allusion to the sharp sight of the fabled dragon."

The dragon, this sharp-sighted creature, is now seized. Though he may have great vision, it appears he didn't see this coming. As far as the act of seizing him, the idea here is of one stronger grabbing and overpowering the weaker. It is comparable in thought to the parable of Jesus from Matthew 12:29 –

> "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

It then follows in thought from Paul's words of Colossians 2:15 concerning Christ Jesus –

> "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

It is with this thought in mind that it appears most likely that this angel is none other than the Lord. It is He who gained victory over the dragon who Johns next says is "that serpent of old." It is an obvious reference to the serpent introduced in the Garden of Eden where it says in Genesis 3:1, "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." Again, this is the last time that the epitaph "serpent" is used in the Bible. Things are coming to a close for him, even if he is not completely eliminated at this point.

To ensure who is being referred to, without any doubt at all, John next says, "who is *the* Devil and Satan." The epitaph of "devil" was introduced in Matthew 4:1 during the temptation of the Lord Jesus –

> "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

This title will be used just one more time, in verse 20:10. Along with being called the devil, John's fourth designating name is provided, Satan. That was first used in Matthew 4:10 by Jesus, showing that the devil and Satan are the same entity –

> "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

The name "Satan" is derived from the Old Testament. Care must be taken when considering the word used there. The Hebrew word *satan*, is used 27 times. However, it simply means "an adversary." It can be speaking of anyone who opposes another. The word is first used to describe the Angel of the Lord in Numbers 22:22 –

> "Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an **adversary** against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants *were* with him."

Also, it is incorrectly translated by most translations as the proper name of Satan in 1 Chronicles 21:1 –

> "Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel."

The reason this is incorrect is twofold. First, it is clearly explained in 2 Samuel 24:1 –

> "Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'"

These words show that it is the Lord who moved David. The second reason is that the word *satan* in 1 Chronicles 21:1 does not include an article before it as "the accuser," *ha'satan*. Only when the article is used does it refer to Satan as a proper noun. This name, *ha'satan*, is first found in Job 1:6 –

> "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and **Satan** also came among them."

This may seem like an unnecessary diversion from the contents of Revelation, but it is not. Understanding who Satan is, and understanding his role in warring against the people of the world at particular times, is an important precept that must be carefully evaluated in order to properly understand the Lord's victory over him. This proper noun, the name "Satan," will be used just one more time in the Bible, in verse 20:7.

Of these words so far, they are a close repeat of what has already been said in Revelation 12:9 –

> "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

For now, and of this angel (probably the Lord Jesus) who has seized Satan, it says, "and bound him for a thousand years." The statement is simple and direct. But no reason is yet given why he is only bound for a thousand years. In verse 20:7, it will state that he is to be released, but even then, only an inference as to why this occurs can be made. For now, it is shown that this wicked entity will be bound for a thousand years.

Life application: One main principle of Bible interpretation is that if something *can* be taken as literal it *should be* taken as literal unless there are compelling reasons why it shouldn't be. The Bible says all the way back at the beginning that Adam and Eve "…heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8). There is no reason to disbelieve this, especially at this early point in Scripture. In fact, if this didn't occur, then it sets the entire Bible up as a document that is convoluted, must be interpreted symbolically, and cannot be trusted in its literal sense.

This truth is the same with the 6 days of creation. The Bible proclaims that all things were created in 6 days. This has been, and it still is, based on the premise that a day is a day. Only with the time of the Enlightenment and the modern development of the

theory of evolution has this been called into question. These are not trifling issues, but items of the greatest importance.

Understanding these things leads us to contemplate the subject verse. This dragon, who is the serpent and who is also known as the devil and Satan, is said to be bound by the angel from heaven "for a thousand years." The dragon of the book of Revelation is understood to be the same foe that tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. This identification with "that serpent of old" now calls out to us to revisit Genesis 3 and to believe that the account written there is, in fact, literal. There literally was a Garden of Eden, there literally was a command given by God, there literally was a temptation, there literally was a fall, and the Lord God literally did walk in the garden. These things are all to be taken as literal, factual accounts of what happened.

The veracity of the rest of the Bible stands or falls on the Genesis account. One cannot, without causing irreparable harm to proper doctrine and theology, dismiss or allegorize what is stated there. In the final three chapters of the Bible, we will see – time and again – references to the Genesis account and how what was lost will be restored. God is telling us to trust that His word is true and that there is a plan that we can hold fast to.

As noted above, the final name which is given in this verse, Satan, is the Hebrew *ha'satan* – the accuser. As noted, he is not the one who moved David to take the census in 1 Chronicles 21:1. Rather, there was a reason the Lord moved as an adversary in this manner. It was to complete the most important real estate contract in history. This purchase, recorded in both 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, still bears on the events of humanity today, and it allows us to know who the rightful owner of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is.

We can know with all certainty that Jesus owns the land. Both the title deed and the genealogical proof of that deed passing to Him are recorded in the Bible. He will return and claim His right to it at the end of the tribulation period and from that spot, he will reign for "a thousand years" of uninterrupted peace. Satan is mentioned in the books of Job and Zechariah in the Old Testament in key passages that help us understand his role in what is going on.

We are asked to believe that there really is a tempter who presented himself as a serpent in Eden and who is the devil, known as Satan. He is a real foe, and he has really come against God's people throughout the ages. And yet, his wicked actions have been used by God – time and time again, to work out His plan of redemption for the people of the world. The devil is a finite being with limited power. God is infinitely wiser than him,

and He is also infinitely more powerful than him. The devil is a defeated foe when we call on Jesus Christ. As such, we are to have no fear of the devil.

One final point concerning this verse, which must be taken as literal, is that the devil is bound for "a thousand years." In fact, the term "a thousand years" is going to be mentioned six times in the next few verses. It is the epitome of hypocrisy for scholars and theologians to "symbolize" or "spiritualize" this into anything other than a literal timeframe. And yet, in order to justify faulty theology, reformed theology – as well as other sects and cults – will claim that this thousand-year period is only "symbolic."

They must do this in order to deny dispensationalism and the notion that God's plan for the land and the people of Israel has not yet been fulfilled. But the premise of the tribulation period of Revelation is to show us that Israel is again in focus, and that Jesus is returning to rule from there and among them for "a thousand years."

This thousand-year rule completes the picture started in the six days of creation. God isn't doing something arbitrary. He is working out a plan based on this six-day creation pattern. Man's time on earth is a six-thousand-year period until Christ comes to rule during the millennium. This thousand-year rule is symbolic of the final Day of Genesis – the seventh day of rest. In fact, in Isaiah, it says that when the Lord rules during this period, His "resting place will be glorious." (Isaiah 11:10).

Everything must be tied together in order to understand the fullness of what God is doing for His creatures and how He is doing it through Jesus. Yes, the thousand-year reign of the Lord from Israel is to be taken literally. To claim that it is "spiritual" or "symbolic" is to diminish the truth of God's word based on one's personal presuppositions, likes, or dislikes.

Stand firm on what God is doing and understand that He is in absolute control of all things! Great is God and great is His plan. And it is all centered on what He has done, is doing, and will do through JESUS!

Lord, we can search Your word forever and still find new treasures in it. Help us to believe what may seem incredible when it is spoken by You. Let us not trust in our own thoughts, but rather to rely on what You have so carefully and graciously revealed to us. Help us to stand fast on Your sure word. To Your glory, we pray, Amen.

and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. Revelation 20:3

John just noted in the previous verse that the devil was to be bound for a thousand years. With that thought in mind, the narrative continues, saying, "and he cast him into the bottomless pit."

The bottomless pit is not the final place of punishment, meaning the Lake of Fire. Rather, it is a holding place where the demons are sent as they await judgment. When Jesus encountered the demon-possessed man in the Gaderenes (also known as the Gerasenes), the demon begged to not be sent to this place –

> "Jesus asked him, saying, 'What is your name?'
> And he said, 'Legion,' because many demons had entered him. **31** And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss." Luke 8:30, 31

Satan is currently the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). He has the ability to affect humanity as he prowls through this realm. However, this will not be the case during the thousand years (the millennium) referred to now in Revelation. Instead, he will be bound and cast into this place where he cannot deceive man as he now does. John continues by showing that this will be without possibility of escape, saying, "and shut him up."

Not only will he be cast into the Abyss, but he will be shut up in there. Whatever manner of containment this is, it is something prepared by God, and it will be inescapable. And further, it then says, "and set a seal on him." The Greek reads, "and sealed over him."

The seal isn't on the devil. This is evident because the previous clause says he is shut up. After he is shut up, a seal has been placed on whatever has shut him in. The authority of the seal is evident and is not to be disturbed. This is "so that he should deceive the nations no more."

The holding of the devil has a specific purpose. He will not be allowed to exercise his authority as the prince of the power of the air. The reason, when thought through, seems obvious. Man has rebelled against God from the beginning. He was deceived in the Garden of Eden by the serpent.

Since then, he has been influenced by the devil throughout each dispensation and wickedness has abounded. In sealing him, there will be a thousand-year reign without his influence, granting man such ideal conditions that it would be incredible to think that he would be willing to turn away from the Lord. At least, this is what one might think. Will such be the case? The Bible indicates otherwise. Satan will be bound "till the thousand years were finished."

This is now the second of six times that the thousand years are mentioned. By repeating the thought, it is telling us that this is not merely a symbolic timeframe, but a literal timeframe.

To deny the millennial reign of Christ is to deny a literal reading of the Bible. From that, anyone can make the Bible say anything. But we are being shown, in advance, that this reign is coming, and we are to accept it at face value.

After this period, and with the unbinding of the devil, he will be allowed to work his evil once again. This is evidenced by the final words of the verse, "But after these things he must be released for a little while." This is a necessity for man to see and understand his complete need for God's provision in Christ. Man did not have the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. As such, maybe he just couldn't process what it meant to reject the word of the Lord.

However, man will be on earth in ideal conditions and while possessing the knowledge of good and evil. What will be the outcome of his temptations when the devil is set free to work his evil once again? Scripture will reveal the answer as we continue.

Life application: As already noted, the term "thousand years" is mentioned for the second of six times in this verse. Only the poorest interpretation possible can come to any other conclusion than that this is a literal thousand years.

The term "millennium" comes from two Latin words *mille* meaning "thousand" and *ennium* meaning "years." This in turn comes from the Greek, which the New Testament is written in, and which says the same thing – *chilias* means "thousand" and *ete* means "years." The reason for citing this is to make clear that what is stated is to be taken literally, especially when the term is used not just once or twice, but six times.

As has been noted, and as we will see again, this thousand-year period is given based on the pattern of creation – of which the menorah of the temple is a symbol. Each branch of the menorah represents a thousand-year period. Christ came at the year 4000. The middle candle of the menorah, which represents the time of His coming, is known as the

Shamash, which means “servant.” Christ, coming at this central point of human history, lights up the ages, just as the *Shamash* is the first candle lit and then which is used to light the other six. At His first advent, He fulfilled the role as the servant. The pattern has been given and it points directly to His work.

The final 1000-year period, the millennium, is being described in these verses of chapter 20. The entire cycle of man on earth, centering on the Person of Jesus Christ, was prefigured based on this seven-day pattern. Jesus Christ will rule on earth in a period of peace and restoration which is spoken of in great detail in the books of the prophets in the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah. It is during this period that the devil will be shut up and the pit will be sealed.

The devil won’t be able to deceive, and the people will live in a state of wonder and beauty. Man failed in Eden at a time when he didn’t have the knowledge of good and evil. He failed when there was no law, and he could live for hundreds of years. In fact, he failed so badly that the world was filled with wickedness and needed to be completely swept clean by a flood.

Man continued to fail after the flood and prior to the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses was introduced and man…. yes, he continued to fail. Then came Christ to fulfill the law on our behalf and His people nailed Him to a tree. He gave His Holy Spirit and filled His people with wisdom and knowledge and the complete revelation of Himself now recorded in Scripture. And yes... the world at large continues to fail and reject Him.

The world will be destroyed again by fire and tribulation and then Christ will rule, physically, from Jerusalem. But even when this occurs, when men live hundreds of years under ideal conditions and in the presence of God incarnate, man will be tested and will …. he will… he will fail again as we will see in the coming verses.

These different dispensations have been given to us to show us our fallen and depraved state, but also to show us the immense grace and mercy of God as is displayed in Jesus Christ. Under every possible condition and in every way possible, man desperately needs Him. To demonstrate this, the devil will be released for a little while. In understanding what is going on, each of us should gladly call out, “THANK GOD FOR JESUS!”

How desperately we need you Lord Jesus! Throughout the ages, You have been with Your people, calling us to Yourself and revealing Yourself to us. And yet, we turn our backs to You and say we want to do it our own way. Such is our fallen state, but such is Your

wondrous grace and mercy. Great are you, O God. Thank you for our wonderful Savior! Hallelujah and Amen.

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Revelation 20:4

The last verse saw Satan cast into the bottomless pit (prior to the millennium) for a thousand years. What is now stated occurs after that, as the thousand years are ready to begin. Before the millennium, there will be a judgment. As it says, "And I saw thrones."

The setting of thrones signifies both rule and judgment. No number of thrones is given, and no names are stated, but it is apparent from other parts of Scripture that judgment will be given to the Lord's disciples. For example, it says in Matthew (and as is repeated in Luke) –

> "So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" Matthew 19:28

> "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed *one* upon Me, [30]that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Luke 22:30

Similarly, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:2, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world." As this is so, it is possible that people from the various nations or ethnic groups will be set on thrones to judge those groups, just as the Jewish apostles of Jesus will judge the twelve tribes. That these are thrones of judgment is confirmed by the words, "and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them."

The Lord will determine who is given the right to rule and judge according to His wisdom, and those chosen will have the authority to decide the cases that are brought before them accordingly. Albert Barnes is correct when he says –

"This was not in relation to the whole race of mankind, but to the martyrs, and to those who, amidst many temptations and trials, had kept themselves pure. The sentence

which is to be passed would seem to be that in consequence of which they are to be permitted to 'live and reign with Christ a thousand years.'"

The judgment now being relayed is a pre-millennial judgment. The final judgment will be a post-millennial judgment conducted by the Lord as is recorded in Revelation 21:11-15. With this in mind, John next says, "Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded."

Here is a word found only this once in Scripture, *pelekizó*. It signifies to cut off with an ax, especially in the sense of beheading. As Islam is famous for execution by beheading, it may be assumed that it will play a major role in the end times in this capacity.

Or it may be that beheading will be the preferred method of execution by a coming world court. France was once famous for their beheadings by the guillotine. It may be that this will be picked up again during the tribulation. As the mark of the beast is to be set on the right hand or the forehead, it may be that beheading will be a means of intimidating those who refuse it. "Because you will not take the mark on your forehead, you will now lose your head."

Among some scholars, the statement, "Then *I saw* the souls," is taken to a ridiculous extreme saying that because the "souls" and not the "bodies" are seen, it cannot be a literal resurrection. This is then an attempt to deny a literal millennial reign of Christ. The rest of the verse, along with the next verse, clearly indicates that these souls will be reunited with bodies in a literal resurrection. Paul speaks of the soul without a body being "naked." Thus, to live and reign with Christ means to have a new body –

> "For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. **2** For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, **3** if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. **4** For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life."
>
> -2 Corinthians 5:1-4

The word next continues by noting those who were beheaded "for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God." This is the basis for their judgment. For those who were willing to witness to the truth of God in Christ and to the truth of the word of God, even to the point of being beheaded, they will receive a favorable judgment, being raised again in this resurrection. Their souls, naked and bodiless, will be brought to a state of restoration.

In testifying to the truth of Jesus and the surety of the word of God, they were confident that their lives would not be lost permanently. Therefore, they are those "who had not worshiped the beast or his image."

This is the dividing line. There will be countless souls killed during the tribulation period, but many of them will have worshiped the beast or his image. In this, they will reject the word of God which tells of Jesus. As such, they will receive condemnation. But for those who will not bow the knee in this unholy manner, their souls will be spared. They "had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands."

Receiving the mark is the identification that an allegiance to the beast and the image has been made. Thus, worship of them is implied in the taking of the mark. Both are voluntary acts, and there is no hint of coercion in one area or the other. The mark will not be forced upon someone who has not first voluntarily given his allegiance and worship to the beast or his image. These tribulation saints will be ratted out and pursued. Jesus, speaking to Israel showed that those during the tribulation will face just this –

> "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. **17** And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. **18** But not a hair of your head shall be lost. **19** By your patience possess your souls." Luke 21:16-18

If some will be put to death, and yet not a hair of their heads will be lost, then this is – without any doubt – referring to a literal resurrection. As such, John finishes with, "And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

These martyred saints will be brought back to physical life with physical bodies, and they will reign with Christ during the millennium. This is the reward for their allegiance to Christ, even when it is to the point of death. They shall be granted life eternal (as will be seen in verse 6). This is now the third of six times that the "thousand years" has been mentioned. Again, it is incredulous to think that supposed scholars of the Bible would ignore the literal nature of what is being conveyed. There will be a thousand-year reign of Christ, and His people will reign with Him.

Life application: There will be an established order at "the regeneration" and there will be those who are given authority to conduct the affairs of the people in positions subservient to Jesus. When Jesus speaks of this regeneration, it is clearly meant as a fulfillment of hundreds of Old Testament prophecies directed specifically toward the

nation of Israel. The world as a whole will be renewed, but this in no way discounts the promises of God to Abraham and his subsequent generations.

Rule and authority will come from Israel at the command of Jesus and with Israel as the head of the nations. And this time of glorious government and peace will be for a thousand years.

There are only a few possible reasons for symbolizing or spiritualizing this amount of time. One is a misunderstanding of the contents of the Bible due to a lack of study. A second is a misunderstanding of these promises because of faulty training – such as "replacement theology" which teaches that the church has "replaced" Israel. The third is an inability to comprehend the contents of the Bible; a failure to take God at his word. And a fourth is anti-Semitism.

The fourth option is becoming more and more prevalent within the church, and it has led to real trouble for Israel now, which – of course – is setting up the very events that will take place in the book of Revelation. God promised this land to Abraham and his physical descendants, and it will remain theirs in this millennial reign.

Another point to consider is that the raising of those who are beheaded because they refuse to worship the beast and his image and who refuse to take the mark is that it belies the notion of a universal application to the concept of the "strong delusion" referred to by Paul in 2 Thessalonians. The vast majority of the people of the world will follow after the antichrist, but there will be a "great multitude" who will overcome this by placing their trust in Christ – even to the point of death.

The teaching that anyone who has heard the gospel before the tribulation begins cannot later be saved during the tribulation is false. There is nothing to hint at this in Scripture, and it diminishes the efficacy of the work of Christ for anyone who believes. As such, this teaching is to be ignored. The love of God in Christ for those who are willing to accept it is available to any and all who will receive it, by faith, before their final breath. None will be turned away who place their trust in JESUS.

Lord, it is so wonderful to read passages in Your word that tell us that every soul who calls on You will be given the life You have promised, even if they have to suffer before it comes. We know that we will indeed have eternal life in Your presence in a restored and perfect setting. As such, we know that the faith we possess is not in vain. For now, give us the courage to stand fast during our trials as we await that glorious day! Amen.

But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Revelation 20:5

The previous verse referred to those who "lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" because they were willing to die rather than take the mark or to worship the beast or his image. After having noted them, this verse now says, "But the rest of the dead."

This is speaking of all who have died apart from Christ, including those who died during the tribulation period. There is a time when all humanity will be brought before God for judgment as is recorded in Revelation 20:11-15. But this will not be until after the millennium. As it says, they "did not live again until the thousand years were finished."

This is now the fourth of six times, within just a few verses, that the "thousand years" is mentioned. By this time, even the dullest of scholars who deny a literal millennial reign should stop and say, "I think I should reevaluate my presuppositions."

Those who were martyred during the tribulation, trusting in Christ for their salvation, will be raised and they will reign with Christ for a thousand years. The others will not be raised until the thousand-year period is over. It is almost inconceivable that anyone who claims he believes the Bible would deny a literal reading of what is being stated. As for those who are raised, John finishes the verse with, "This *is* the first resurrection."

Like a literal millennium, scholars of the past (and even today) have gone out of their way to deny that this is a literal, bodily resurrection. However, other than Luke 2:34 that speaks of the "rising up" of many, the word translated as "resurrection" always means exactly that. Despite that, some say this "resurrection" is simply referring to the conversion of the Jews in the end times. But what would be the point of verse 4 and of verse 6, both of which are referring to issues that are specifically dealing with the dead being raised to life and physically reigning with Christ?

Rather, this is referring to exactly what is presented in the text, meaning a literal resurrection of the dead, and then their ruling with Christ for a thousand years. To say that this isn't a literal resurrection then calls into question the resurrection of Christ, a subject Paul deals with in detail in 1 Corinthians 15.

As far as the words of this verse, the twentieth letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet corresponds to this twentieth chapter of Revelation. The twentieth letter is Resh, meaning "head," "first," "top," or "beginning." It is pictured by the head of a man. Here we see the "first" resurrection corresponding to Resh.

Life application: By the constant repetition of the words "thousand years," God is ensuring that we understand this to be a literal period. And because of what occurred in verse 4, and then what is mentioned today, no other option is within the realm of reason.

In John 5, Jesus gave these words to us –

> "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice **29** and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." John 5:28, 29

Jesus speaks of one resurrection here, but this in no way limits there being two resurrections. This is the same as the Old Testament prophets who openly spoke of the coming of the Messiah and yet there are two advents. What is concealed is later revealed at a time of God's choosing. The rapture was concealed until Paul first spoke of it in 1 Corinthians 15. After that, it was mentioned again on several occasions. However, both the rapture and the two advents of the Messiah are both shadowed or prefigured in the Old Testament even if they weren't explicitly stated.

These hints are given so that after they come about, it is realized that what was being noted wasn't an aberration, but something God had already presented in veiled terms. In other words, when the shadows come to pass, we have no excuse for not realizing them. Paul explains this concept when speaking of the Old Testament feast days of Israel in Colossians 2:16, 17.

What is concealed in the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. But the same is also true within the New. There are hints of things said by Jesus and/or the apostles elsewhere which are clearly stated in Revelation. Such is the case with there being two resurrections. The first one was noted in the previous verse while this verse notes who will *not* be a part of it. It thus refers to anyone who had not received God's forgiveness through Christ prior to the rapture, or anyone who had not been martyred for Christ during the tribulation.

That leaves two categories: 1) Those who survived the tribulation and will enter the millennial reign of Christ, either a believer or not and, 2) Anyone who died during the tribulation who had not received Christ. The former (assuming they did not take the mark of the beast) will, presumably, be given the opportunity to call on Christ during the millennium and the latter will be a part of the second resurrection. As we will see, the

first resurrection is a resurrection of life; the second resurrection is a resurrection of judgment.

It is rather difficult to see how some scholars will purposely ignore what is explicit because it doesn't fit their view of eschatology (last things). The Bible makes it clear that Israel was not replaced by the church and that dispensationalism is the correct view of how God is working in and through His creation for the redemption of man. Each step is revealing to us the wondrous workings of our Lord in redemptive history. Each step reveals JESUS.

Lord, I choose Jesus now! Amen.

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Revelation 20:6

The words now reveal the fifth of seven blessings promised in Revelation. So far, they have been –

> "Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near." (Rev 1:3)
>
> "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes," says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" (Rev 14:13)
>
> "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." (Rev 16:15)
>
> "Then he said to me, 'Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God.'" (Rev 19:9)
>
> "Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." (Rev 20:6)

With this in mind, John begins the verse with, "Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection." The idea of this blessed state is that of being enviable or fortunate because of receiving the provision of God. A benefit has been extended to the

person and a state of true happiness is the result. Those who have received the first resurrection stand in this blessed state.

Being "holy" means being set apart. There is an intimate union that has been established between them and God. They are set apart to Him because their faith in Christ has set them apart. From there, John explains why this is with the words, "Over such the second death has no power."

The "second death" was introduced into Scripture in Revelation 2:11 –

> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

It is now mentioned for the second time. It will be mentioned two more times before Revelation closes out –

> "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. **15** And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Revelation 20:14, 15

> "And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. **7** He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. **8** But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.'" Revelation 21:6-8

The "second death" is the Lake of Fire. It is the final state for all humanity apart from God. Jesus is the only way to avoid this fate. To believe in Him is to overcome. To overcome means that they have been spared from this second death. They have moved from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is the reconnection to God that was lost at the very beginning when Adam sinned.

Through faith in Christ, one is born again. The reconnection is made, and its effects are eternal. As it says, of those who are raised in the first resurrection, the "second death has no power." Their eternal state is secure in Christ. Of them, it next says, "but they shall be priests of God and of Christ."

After being literally raised from the dead, they will serve at a literal, physical temple on earth. The temple will be in Jerusalem, and it is likely that it is what is described in the

final chapters of Ezekiel. In this capacity, they will serve in a priestly capacity. Along with that, John next says, “and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

This is now the fifth of six times (in just five verses) that the term “thousand years” is used. It is as if the Lord is trying to clue us into the fact that He really means “a thousand years” and that this isn’t just some symbolic timeframe that is being referred to.

Those who are raised in the first resurrection are literally raised. Those so raised will never be separated from God again. Those who are raised will serve God and His Christ at a literal temple in Jerusalem. Those who are raised will serve there for a thousand years. These points are to be taken literally. The Old Testament clearly indicates that these things will occur, and now the book of Revelation confirms that it is so.

As a point of theology, there is a debate concerning the temple sacrifices that are detailed in Ezekiel 45, 46. Are these actually effectual or not.

First, this makes the assumption that Ezekiel is referring to the millennial temple. This can be and is debated. It doesn't affect one's salvation to come down on either side of the debate, so there is no need to address that now. But assuming it describes the millennial temple. Why then would they have sacrifices if Christ is the end of the law, including the sacrifices of the law, which He is (Hebrews 7:18, 8:13, 10:9, etc.)?

The answer is that those sacrifices are not effectual, but commemorative. None of the Old Testament sacrifices under the Law of Moses were effectual? This is clearly stated in Hebrews 10:4. And so, what purpose did they serve under the Mosaic covenant? They were anticipatory of the coming Christ. To understand this, you can watch the Superior Word Leviticus sermons. In them, it is seen that every detail points to Christ.

As those sacrifices under the law were not effectual, then why would it be wrong to have them after the time of Christ even if they are still not effectual? Anticipatory and commemorative both accomplish the same thing – they point to Christ. There is no problem at all with there being a real temple (which points to Christ), a real sacrificial system (which points to Christ), and etc.

The only truly effectual sacrifice for sin is Jesus Christ. Looking forward in anticipation of Him, or receiving what He has done now, it is Christ Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No person will come to the Father apart from Him.

<u>Life application:</u> The term “blessed” is given as a complete contrast to what it would be like without the resurrection. We can find a hint of this in 1 Corinthians 15:18, 19 –

> “And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! **18** Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **19** If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul speaks about the uselessness of living as a Christian if Christ didn’t really rise. Here we are living lives as believers and striving for holiness in order to please God whom we believe has saved us and whom we also believe will grant us eternal life. But without Christ’s resurrection, this is nothing more than a pipe dream. It would also lead to a complete waste of life. Instead of being pious, nice, giving and forgiving, and honoring of God, it would be a lot more fun to live in passion, excess, and walking over others… if this is all there is, then what difference does it make?

But the fact is that Christ did come, Christ did die on the cross to pay our sin-debt, and Christ did rise again. Because of this, we have every hope that this life is not the true life, and this world is not our true home. Those who entered the tribulation period and came to realize this were then willing to give up this life in hopes of a better eternal state. Their perseverance, even to the point of death, is rewarded with the resurrection of the righteous that Jesus speaks about in Luke 14:14.

In addition to being “blessed” they are also noted as holy. They are sanctified, purified, and set apart to God for His glory – forever. Daniel speaks about the contrast between those who receive the resurrection of the righteous and those who will be resurrected to condemnation –

> “At that time Michael shall stand up,
> The great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people;
> And there shall be a time of trouble,
> Such as never was since there was a nation,
> *Even* to that time.
> And at that time your people shall be delivered,
> Every one who is found written in the book.
> **2** And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
> Some to everlasting life,
> Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.
> **3** Those who are wise shall shine
> Like the brightness of the firmament,
> And those who turn many to righteousness
> Like the stars forever and ever.” Daniel 12:1-3

Daniel is not saying that these resurrections will occur at the same time, he is merely noting that they will both occur. God doesn't reveal everything all at once, but He has slowly revealed His plan over many centuries, through many prophets, and in a progressive manner. The first resurrection is separate from the rapture and is also separate from another resurrection which will be noted later.

Those who participate in the first resurrection receive a wonderful promise and a great reward. As the second death is the Lake of Fire, and because it is eternal in nature, then if the second death has no power over them, this must be a resurrection to eternal life. Those so raised can never die again.

Concerning the literal nature of the events as noted above, don't be a doubter. Rather, stand firm on what God is telling us. All of the promises of the Old Testament that God made to His people Israel will be fulfilled, literally, completely, and faithfully. God is ever faithful to keep His promises, even to His rebellious people. The refining fire of the tribulation will bring them back to their senses and God will be pleased to dwell among them again. The word is sure and reliable. It is the word of God in Christ, our Lord JESUS!

Lord God, it is simply wonderful to know that You are ever faithful. Your faithfulness doesn't depend on our faithfulness at all. And thank goodness for that. If it did, we would all perish. But You are longsuffering and full of mercy, and You will never fail to keep every promise. What a glorious and perfect God You are! Amen.

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison
Revelation 20:7

John has, since the beginning of the chapter, been dealing with events just as the tribulation period ends, and then the events that follow in a time known as the millennial reign of Christ. As it says, "Now when the thousand years have expired."

This verse now marks the sixth time in just six verses that the "thousand years" have been mentioned. This is again notably stated because, as has been seen in the previous five occasions, God expects us to accept that this is referring to a literal timeframe. We are not to gloss over it with merely "symbolic" connotations. As such, this thousand-year timeframe is at its close.

Of note, is that in Revelation 20:3, 20:5, and 20:7 the same form of the verb *teleó* has been used. It is in the aorist subjunctive verb form, *telesthē*. Young's Literal Translation correctly translates all three instances as "may be finished." It is indicating that the

event will come at a set time. When this set time arrives, only then will the thing which is to take place actually occur.

The verb form *telesthē* is only used elsewhere in Luke 12:50 and gives the sense of the anticipation of a coming event –

> "but I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I pressed till it may be completed!" YLT

An actual event lies ahead, and it is anticipated by the close of a set time. This is the sense of the coming end of the thousand years in Revelation. It is thus a certainty that this timeframe is not a symbolic representation, but rather a definite timeframe with an anticipated concluding event, which is that "Satan will be released from his prison."

The fact that Satan was bound means that he was completely subdued. The fact that Satan is released shows that this is a part of a set plan and is accomplished for a set purpose. The Lord is completely in control of the events, and what occurs is then to be instructional. The *result* of the release of Satan will be seen in the coming verses, but the *reason* for allowing it is not given. Thus, the reader is being asked to come to a conclusion as to why this will come to pass. That reason has been alluded to already and will continue to be considered as the coming verses are presented.

Life application: The thousand-year period, mentioned six times in six verses, is to be taken as a literal timeframe. The constant repetition of this leaves no other reasonable explanation. However, and despite this, it may lead the student of the Bible to ask, "If this is a literal thousand-year period, then why are no specific details given about it? Why such little detail about the millennium?" There are at least three good answers for this:

First and foremost – very, very specific details *have* been given. They just haven't been given here. Rather, the millennial period is described in the Old Testament, particularly in Isaiah, but elsewhere as well. They are also in the four Gospels. Why in these areas? Because the promises were made to Israel and not to the church!

The inclusion of Gentiles in the church age was a previously unknown mystery (Ephesians 3:4-6). A certain number of Gentiles would be brought into what God is doing (Romans 11:25), and then Israel would be reinstated as God's main focus and in fulfillment of those Old Testament promises (and which are inferred in Jesus' words as well, such as in Matthew 19:28).

The Gentile-led church age is thus a timeframe prior to the Millennial Reign of Christ. The "throne of David" (see Isaiah 9:7) implies the physical people of Israel with their Messiah reigning and ruling in their midst. Unless one is willing to accept this premise, the rest of the Bible becomes a book of "spiritualized" truths being incorrectly interpreted by trial and error and a lack of proper analysis concerning future events. There is no true surety except in the words of the epistles. This should clue the reader into the fact that God has a plan working that such scholars have thus misinterpreted.

The second reason why no specific details are given in Revelation is because they are not necessary for faith in worship. From creation to the Flood of Noah is a 1656-year period and yet very little is included there, despite the fact that there could have been as many as billions of people on the earth by then. In all, only a few are mentioned by name. The reason for this is that only they were relevant to the narrative. The same is true with the coming millennial period. Any further details than those previously stated are not necessary for us to understand what God is doing and why.

The third reason for the minimal detail takes the opposite view. What does occur and what is relevant to the people who live during that time is specifically *not* noted because it may interfere with the people's faith in worship if known in advance. As such, God has not revealed it.

This would be similar to the church knowing the day of the rapture. Having this information would actually work against our conduct on numerous levels and for several very distinct and obvious reasons. And, therefore, God has not given us that (and so very much more) information. The millennial reign is no different. God has determined to reserve any information outside of the Old Testament and the Gospels for Himself.

The exception, however, is those verses we have looked at so far in this chapter and which continue through verse 10. This is all that God has added for our understanding of this thousand-year period.

As noted in a previous commentary, the releasing of Satan is a necessary occurrence to show us the utter depravity of man and his tendency to accept deception over the truth. Even in ideal conditions, with the Lord ruling on earth, man can be led astray from what is true. This then highlights the great grace and mercy of the Lord, and it shows how desperately we need to cling to Him.

There is no time or situation where man can stand alone without the grace of Jesus Christ, even under the most ideal of conditions. Our very nature and tendency is towards wickedness and away from the things of God. When we see this, especially

when noted during a time of such wonderful beauty and harmony on earth such as the Old Testament prophets reveal concerning this thousand-year period, we should marvel at the majesty and glory of the cross. Without it, we stand completely and utterly exposed before our infinitely holy Creator.

Take time to reflect on this today. Reflect on the beauty of the Lord, our Lord JESUS.

O Jesus, how could You do what You did for beings such as us? We have turned away from You, mocked You, ridiculed You, and blasphemed You. And yet, knowing this would occur, You came and fulfilled the law that condemns us and then took our punishment upon Yourself. And now, You offer us Your righteousness in exchange for our unrighteousness. My God, how great Thou art. Amen.

and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. Revelation 20:8

With the release of Satan after the thousand years, we now read, “and will go out.” Here, some translations say, “and will come out.” The verb can mean either. It depends on the perspective of what is being conveyed. If the earth is given in relation to the bottomless pit, then “come out” is appropriate. If this is in relation to a point after his release, then “go out” makes more sense. Thus, there is nothing wrong with either translation. Either way, his intent in going forth will be “to deceive the nations.”

It is a test for humanity, just as has occurred in every dispensation. Satan deceived Adam and his wife in the Garden of Eden and they failed. Such was the case with Israel under the law. Today, in the Dispensation of Grace, we are given the offer of eternal life through simply believing that God has done all the work and believing that gospel message – Christ died for our sins, Christ was buried, and Christ rose again. And yet, the world has, for the most part, rejected this.

Now, at the end of the millennium, Satan is released in order to see how man will respond under the ideal conditions they live in, and with Christ ruling from Jerusalem. Each dispensation shows us the depravity of the human heart and man’s inability to respond to God in an appropriate manner.

Regardless of the situation, man’s tendency is to reject God’s rule and authority. Such is the case with Satan’s release as he goes to “deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth.”

One can see a worldwide rebellion brewing by the term. Many will believe the lie and turn away from the truth they have been told. Just as any person on earth could have gone up to Adam during his 930-year life and asked if the story about him was true, so any person on earth could easily verify if the story of Christ is true.

But man's proclivity is to believe nonsense. Ten thousand conspiracies a day are published on the internet, and there is always someone there to believe them and pass them on. Satan will again deceive the nations like this. In this, John specifically mentions "Gog and Magog."

In Ezekiel 38 and 39, there is a battle described which has come to be known as the coming "Battle of Gog and Magog." It details a battle that is expected to occur either just before or just after the time of the rapture (after appears to be most likely).

This is not the Battle of Armageddon nor is it the same as the battle described in this verse. This is evident based on Ezekiel 38:8 –

> "After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword *and* gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely."

As this speaks of a land "brought back from the sword" and "which had long been desolate," it is not referring to the end of the millennium, but before the millennium begins. The land had been laid bare for two thousand years, but is made productive once again. This description, clearly showing that it is not the same battle now described in Revelation, continues on with such clues in Ezekiel 38:12 and 39:25-29.

With that understood, the use of the names Gog and Magog shows that the same spirit which stirred up these forces will again be stirred up a thousand years later. The same people from the same area of the world will try to come against Israel just as they did a thousand years earlier. In fact, that may be the way Satan deceives the nations, using this great defeat as an excuse to go and take what supposedly should "rightly" belong to these people groups.

Whatever way he deceives them, it will be in order "to gather them together to battle." War implies conquest and taking plunder. The envy of the nations will spur them on, leading them forward in order to take what they believe is within their grasp. And it will be no small army. Rather, it will be a force "whose number is as the sand of the sea."

This is a term used throughout Scripture to denote an immense number. It is used in Genesis several times, Joshua, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and so on. The deception will be great, and the number of people induced to come against Israel and Jerusalem will be seemingly immeasurable.

Life application: Islam has supposed complaints against Christianity today. They look back on the crusades and claim that what happened was an offense against Islam that needs to be righted. Any land once held by Muslims is, supposedly, always land that is to belong to them. It is this attitude that has brought about constant wars and killing in order to regain what they have lost.

Likewise, it is common for people today to look at slavery of the past and demand reparations for what occurred. However, only the details that suit the narrative are focused on. The fact that people in Africa sold their own people to the slave traders is ignored. The fact that there were white slaves is ignored. The fact that blacks were also slave owners is ignored. And the fact that white people gave up their fortunes and even their lives to free the slaves is ignored. Only that which suits a set narrative is focused on.

It could be this same type of thinking that Satan may use to deceive the nations. Whatever it is, it reveals that the world will overlook the majority of the details of what occurred in the past and will simply focus on parts that suit their liking in order to justify their rising up against Israel.

Just as people today reject the fact that Jesus is the God/Man, people in the millennium will do the same. The same spirit of disbelief and wickedness that exists in the human heart today will exist in the people of the world at that time. The world will be repopulated and living under ideal conditions and yet there will be dissatisfaction at having to live in proper and holy conduct as God requires.

Once again, man will reject the good and the world will spin into temporary chaos and rebellion. What a mess we are when we live apart from God's will. What a mess man is when he fails to acknowledge what God has done through our great Lord JESUS.

How can it be that we simply can't get it right! O God, You have given us Your word and everything that is going to happen is noted there. And yet we refuse to open the book, learn from it, and live by it. What a mess we are. Despite this, You continue to stretch out Your arms and lovingly call us back to You. What a great and wonderful Lord You are! Amen.

They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. Revelation 20:9

The words now are referring to those of the nations who have been deceived by Satan and who have been gathered together for battle, specifically called "Gog and Magog." Of them, John now says, "They went up on the breadth of the earth."

The deception will be so great that vast hordes of people will be involved. The previous verse spoke of the deception going out to the "four corners of the earth." People will stream from all directions and be "as the sand of the sea" so that they will cover everything. The terminology is similar to that which described the Chaldeans coming against Jerusalem at the time of Habakkuk –

> "For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans,
> A bitter and hasty nation
> Which marches through the breadth of the earth,
> To possess dwelling places *that are* not theirs." Habakkuk 1:6

Of these vast multitudes, John next says, "and surrounded the camp of the saints." The word translated as "camp" is a compound noun coming from two words signifying "a throwing beside." It is a word that can mean a castle, a barracks, an army in battle array, and so on. The context determines the meanings. In this case, it is the layout of space allocated for the saints.

In Ezekiel 45:1-8, land is specifically set aside in exacting measurement in relation to the sanctuary. It seems likely that this is what is being referred to here. It is the place where the saints minister to the Lord in the temple. That designated area is inclusive of, and surrounds, Jerusalem, of which John next says, "and the beloved city."

Without a doubt, this is referring to Jerusalem. It is a literal attack coming against it, not a spiritualized battle where the foes of the church rally against her. The idea of Jerusalem being the beloved city is found in Psalm 78 –

> "But chose the tribe of Judah,
> Mount Zion which He loved.
> **69** And He built His sanctuary like the heights,
> Like the earth which He has established forever." Psalm 78:68, 69

This great army, one not unlike the one prophesied in Ezekiel 38 and 39, will be gathered together, repeating the same pattern that occurred a thousand years earlier. The same results will occur at that time as well. As John next says, "And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."

This was prophesied for Gog and Magog in Ezekiel–

> "I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains," says the Lord GOD. "Every man's sword will be against his brother. **22** And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who *are* with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. **23** Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I *am* the LORD."
>
> -Ezekiel 38:21-23

> "And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I *am* the LORD. **7** So I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not *let them* profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that *I am* the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. **8** Surely it is coming, and it shall be done," says the Lord GOD. "This *is* the day of which I have spoken." Ezekiel 39:6-8

The thought here is that the same groups will repeat the same mistake, thus demonstrating that man will refuse to learn to trust in God's word. Instead, he will inevitably believe the lies of Satan. It is the wickedness of the human heart that is on display here. As Solomon says –

> "That which has been *is* what will be,
> That which *is* done is what will be done,
> And *there is* nothing new under the sun." Ecclesiastes 1:9

Life application: It is believed that, throughout history, Jerusalem has been destroyed partially or entirely approximately forty times. It has been the center of the nations, and even today the world's eyes are focused on this teeny piece of property in the little country known as Israel.

There are such weighty claims to it that no one is sure how to resolve the matter. So heavy and burdensome is the stone known as Jerusalem in today's world that as Zechariah prophesies, "…all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it" (Zechariah 12:3).

History, at the beginning of the tribulation period, will recapitulate history at the end of the millennium. Apparently, after the devil is released, he will deceive the people in some way once again. He is an inciter to violence, and he tempts people in his three consistent ways – by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and by the pride of life. This was his mode of corruption in Eden, it is what John warns about in his first epistle, and it is the way he tested Jesus in the wilderness as is recorded in the gospels. He will use his power to tempt one last time to take as many souls as possible to hell along with him.

He knows that the book is written, and the outcome is already known to God. He knows that God's word will be fulfilled. Despite this, he will make his final move. However, the move will be brought to an abrupt end. Unlike the tribulation period which encompasses most of chapters 4-19 of the book of Revelation, this battle takes up a few sentences. Unless there is a battle where the details are simply brushed over, when armies are gathered against the city and the people of God, the Lord will act, and the rebellion will be over immediately.

There are numerous times that fire comes from heaven in the Old Testament. It is in a way that demonstrates God's power to God's people. And so, it will be one final time at the end of the ages. God will show Himself holy, in the presence of, and on behalf of, His people, protecting them and consuming those who would harm them. "'For I,' says the Lord, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst'" (Zechariah 2:5).

The Lord will act because He is the Lord – great, powerful, and covenant-keeping. He is JESUS!

Heavenly Father, knowing that You have already determined to protect Your people who will live even a thousand years from now assures us that You are completely in control of all things in all ages. We can know that we have nothing to fear because You have, do, and always will tend to the needs of those who have called on You. Thank You for this wonderful assurance. Amen.

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:10

The previous verse detailed God's protection of the camp of the saints and the beloved city when fire was brought down upon the attackers. With that completed, the

attention is now brought to focus on the one who deceived them in the first place. John says, “The devil, who deceived them.”

The verb is a present participle. It rightly reads, “The devil, who is deceiving them.” The words are active and alive. They show that right up until the very end, the devil never stops deceiving the people. His nature never changes. It is reflective of Jesus’ words concerning him –

> “You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources,* for he is a liar and the father of it.” John 8:44

Of this wicked entity, John says he “was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.” And the crowd goes wild! The one who has brought such calamity upon the people of the world, even since the earliest times, is chucked into the lake for an eternal swim in fire and brimstone. But he will not be alone. John reminds us that this is “where the beast and the false prophet *are*.” Their fate was noted in the previous chapter –

> “Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.” Revelation 19:20

Imagine! The beast and the false prophet have now been burning for a thousand years, and yet it notes that they are still there. With the devil now joining them, they will continue to suffer their deserved punishment forever. John says as much with the next words, “And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

This is the fate of any who will later be cast into the lake of fire. The idea of annihilationism is not to be found in Scripture. Those who are not granted access to God’s paradise through Christ will be cast into the lake of fire for their own eternal swim in punishment. That was noted earlier in chapter 14 –

> “Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, **10** he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. **11** And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they

have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'" Revelation 14:9-11

This same truth will again be seen in the verses ahead.

Life application: The devil, who is the serpent and Satan, came on to the scene in Genesis chapter 3, the third chapter into the Bible. He now makes his eternal departure from the scene in the third chapter from the end of the Bible – the symmetry of the Bible is stunningly beautiful in so many ways. It bears both the fingerprints and the wisdom of God in all that it reveals to us.

The devil is the same evil character who deceived Adam and Eve at the very beginning. He is a cunning foe, and he has followed the same wicked path since the beginning. This must be noted because, if he was there at the beginning and he is there at the end of the millennium, then he is also present now.

This is what the Bible records concerning him, and therefore his cunning deceit is not to be underestimated. Only during the millennial reign of Christ, while he is bound in chains in the bottomless pit, will the world be free from his temptations. However, there will be an end to his wickedness, and this verse reveals that glorious day.

This is an important verse because it dispels false concepts of hell. It is not a place where sin is eventually purged from those in it so that they can be restored to God. It is also not a place of annihilation. Both of these concepts are proven false by the fact that it has been one thousand years since the beast and the false prophet were cast into it, and yet they are still there, receiving their just torment for their wicked actions.

Further, we see that their punishment will go on forever. There will be no end to it. Unfortunately, for all who reject Jesus Christ, the punishment will be the same. It is not something that anyone will think is fun when it comes. There will be no "getting together with old friends for parties" or any of the other crazy things people say about their end.

There are only two choices for fallen man: receive Jesus Christ and be reconciled to God through His cross or be forever separated from God. The latter involves following the beast, the false prophet, and Satan into the lake of fire. Now is the time to choose, and now is the day of salvation. Make the right choice while there is time. Call out to God through His offer of peace. Come to Him through JESUS.

Great and glorious Lord Jesus, please help us to learn to speak to others now about Your wonderful work. Help our words to be clear and right and in accord with Your word, so that others will be able to understand the glory of what You have done for us, and to be able to avoid the eternal punishment of the lake of fire. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. Revelation 20:11

The scene now set forth is a post-millennial judgment. Satan has been cast into the Lake of Fire, and now will come the final judgment of all humanity not previously raptured or raised. Of this judgment, John begins with, "Then I saw a great white throne."

It is a throne of justice. The white signifies perfect righteousness. The judgment will be pure and unbiased. John next says, "and Him who sat on it."

The Greek is a present participle. It says, "Then Him who is sitting on the throne." The scene is active and alive. This is referring to Christ Jesus. God is unseen. This is made perfectly evident in Scripture. However, Jesus who is fully God and fully Man, reveals the unseen God to man, and it is to Jesus that all judgmental authority belongs –

> "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, **23** that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." John 5:22, 23

Christ, sitting on the throne of God, has already been seen in Revelation 3:21 –

> "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

To sit down with His Father does not mean that the Father literally sits on a throne. God is Spirit and has no parts. Jesus' words indicate a position of authority. That position is His. In this judgment before the great white throne, John next says of Jesus (who sits upon the throne), "from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away."

The symbolism is apocalyptic. A similar instance was seen in Revelation 6:14. The terminology is also like that found at various times in Scripture, such as Psalm 18:7-15; Psalm 77:16-19; and Psalm 114:3-5. These and other references describe the creation fleeing from the presence of the Lord. The idea is that in seeing Him in His glory, everything else recedes from sight. As such, John says, "And there was found no place for them."

Again, the thought is like that of the parting of the Red Sea or the parting of the Jordan. When the Lord's presence is made manifest, the creation flees back from Him. In the full presentation of the splendor of the Lord at this final judgment, all creation will appear to flee away from Him. The only thing evident to the eyes of those before the throne will be the One who created all those things.

In other words, the creation that they are a part of, that they relied on, that they idolized, and that they thought was the source of their existence is nothing in comparison to the One who created it all. They failed to look beyond the creation to their Creator, and now they find that the only thing of true value is what they failed to seek out and glorify. No place is found for those things because the Source of those things is there before them. His glory causes all else to recede into obscurity.

Life application: The final judgment of all humans who had not previously been granted eternal life will come someday. Those who were called up to Christ at the rapture will be witnesses of this judgment, not a part of it. Likewise, those who were part of the first resurrection are also safe from this judgment. Only those who didn't previously participate in one of these two events, along with those who lived during the millennial reign and who did not take the mark of the beast, will be involved here.

A progression of thought, concerning Christ as Creator, proceeds all the way through until He is seen as the final Judge upon the throne. In Colossians 1:16, it says, "All things were created through Him and for Him." Jesus was the mediator between God and the creation at the very beginning. He is the One through whom all things came into existence (see also John 1:3).

In the next verse of Colossians 1:17, it says, "And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." Jesus is the continued Mediator between God and the creation after all things were created – "in Him all things consist (or are 'held together')."

Jesus is also the direct Mediator between God and Man as is noted in 1 Timothy 2:5. There it says, "For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus." The Bible is absolutely clear on this precept. The Pope has no authority to mediate between God and man. No pastor or preacher has such authority. No angelic being or apostle has this authority. There is one and only one point of mediation between God and man, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is also the Judge of man. By His own words of John 5 (cited above), we know that He will be the One there at the final judgment of man.

One must understand the nature of the Godhead in order to comprehend the nature of our relationship with God. Jesus fills all of these positions because He is the full expression of God in bodily form. He is continuously, ceaselessly, and endlessly revealing to us the unseen Father. Thus, all judgment has been committed to the Son. We err when we bow to any other god, when we look to horoscopes for daily counsel, or when we look to a human figure – living or dead – to submit our prayers or petitions to. All of these things cause us to miss the mark. It is Jesus to whom we owe our devotion and supplication.

In saying that creation will flee away from His presence, there are several general thoughts on what this means. The first is that creation will literally be utterly swept away and that what is coming will be a new creation. It will be something that never existed before. The second thought is that this creation will be utterly purified by His glory, and so what is coming will be a new creation – as if one were to make something from clay – such as a bowl – and then completely start over with that material and make something new.

Based on the words of Genesis 1 and 2, and considering that redeemed man will continue to exist with Christ forever, it would appear that the second option is more likely. This will continue to be evaluated in verses to come.

Creation will be purified and perfected to its original state. Paul seems to allude to this in Romans 8:20-22 as well. No matter what occurs with the created order, those who are saved by the blood of Christ will exist for all eternity in His presence, completely free from corruption, impurity, or defilement.

Of this, we can be certain. God's word is clear and unambiguous in this. God has promised eternal life to those who come to Him as He has set forth in the giving of JESUS.

What a marvelous thought it is! Oh Lord Jesus, to see You in all of Your glory is more than our minds can imagine. You have taken sinful people and redeemed them to Yourself in such a way that we won't be utterly consumed when Your glory is revealed. You have covered us with Your own precious blood. What a great and glorious Lord! Hallelujah and Amen.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book* of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.
Revelation 20:12

With the great white throne brought into the forefront of John's view in the previous verse, he now continues with the narrative, saying, "And I saw the dead, small and great." This is an expression that simply means, "and I saw all of humanity from the small to the great." At times, more expressive terms are used, but this one is simple enough to say that none will be exempt, from the small to the great.

Of this, Albert Barnes says, "The fair meaning in this place therefore is, that all the dead would be there, and of course this would preclude the idea of a 'previous' resurrection of any part of the dead, as of the saints, at the beginning of the millennium. There is no intimation here that it is the wicked dead that are referred to in this description of the final judgment. It is the judgment of all the dead."

There is no reason to assume this. The Bible clearly speaks of a rapture of the church, and it also refers to the first resurrection. One must deny a literal reading of those events in order to dismiss them as something other than what is referred to. Further, Paul notes that believers in the church must appear before the judgment (bema) seat of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:10). Nothing is said there of a great white throne judgment. The two are, therefore, distinct judgments. Understanding this, John says of this mass of humanity that they are "standing before God."

It is an expression that means they are exposed before Him as creatures before their Creator. He is the judge, and they are the judged. As judgment has been granted to Christ Jesus, He is the member of the Godhead they actually appear before. While standing there, it says, "and books were opened."

The same terminology was seen in Daniel 7:10. The order of events there is not the same as here in Revelation, but it is certainly referring to the same judgment upon humanity. The idea of books being opened is that there is a documented record of the life and deeds of humanity.

This does not mean that a literal book, as we think of it, is kept. The imagery is given for us to understand that all of what man has done is recorded. At the time of John, a *biblion*, or a papyrus roll, was the standard means of recording things. Later, books as we know them today were used. Now, we record things on computer hard drives or various other devices. The symbolism is set forth so that the truth is conveyed, regardless as to the means of recording such things. Each person's record is to be evaluated. John next says, "And another book was opened, which is *the Book* of Life."

This book has already been seen in Revelation 3:5 –

> "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

This "Book of Life" is that which records those who have gone from the spiritual death of Adam to the born-again life of Jesus Christ. All who have been restored to a right relationship with God through Christ are recorded in the Book of Life. With this understood, it next says, "And the dead were judged according to their works."

There are several possibilities as to what could be conveyed here, but the simplest explanation is that all the dead standing before the throne will be judged on their deeds. Those who are recorded in the Book of Life will have their deeds judged for their eternal state in heaven, just as believers in the church will when they go before the judgment seat of Christ.

Those who are not in the book of life will be judged for their deeds, setting their eternal fate in hell. As such, there will be greater punishment for those whose deeds were more wicked. In the end, however, those who are saved will have eternal glory in heaven, and those who are not will have eternal condemnation in hell. It is by their deeds that the state in one of those places will be determined. As John says, "by the things which were written in the books."

The record of the life of all people will be taken into account. God is perfectly just, and He will reward each person exactly as is deserved and without any partiality at all.

Life application: Everything we as humans do is recorded. If we fail to come to Jesus Christ, we will not receive His covering and we will stand utterly exposed and naked before our Creator. There will be absolutely no doubt of guilt, though now we as humans try to hide it. Every person who has ever lived will receive his judgment. There will be no soul left unremembered before God.

Concerning the term "God" in this verse, some manuscripts have "the throne" instead of "God." As the throne is the throne of God, the intent is the same – it is Jesus who sits to judge. Unfortunately, some scholars try to disconnect the two (God and Jesus) when the terminology changes, but one must continually ask, "Is Jesus God?" The answer is "Yes." Therefore, based on Jesus' own words about all judgment being committed to Him, it is He before whom they stand.

Why does it say God (or "the throne," implying the throne of God) then? The reason is so simple that it is easily overlooked. It is *because* He is God that the term is used. In

other words, even those who have denied His deity during their lives – such as members of the Jehovah's Witnesses and other cults, as well as unbelieving Jews – will realize that the One they are now being judged by is the One whose deity they denied.

From the first chapter of the Bible, all the way through to the last, the concept of the Trinity and the concept of the God/Man are to be found, understood, and accepted. God has stepped out of His eternal domain and united with human flesh in the Person of Jesus in order to show us the unseen Father. Now, at the end of the ages, these people await their judgment.

For sure, the book of works is insufficient to save. Paul sums this up in Ephesians 2:8, 9 –

> "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast."

At this judgment, no person will say, "I deserve eternal life based on what I did." Either they are saved through faith in Christ Jesus and are recorded in the Book of Life, or they worked out their lives apart from Christ. If the latter is the case, they will see the futility of the life they lived.

What a terrifying thought – to stand naked and exposed before the Living God without the covering of Christ. May none presume that deeds are sufficient to appease the wrath of God for sins committed while in the flesh. May we understand now the severity of the consequences of the choices we make concerning our beautiful, perfect, just, righteous, and holy Lord – JESUS.

Lord Jesus, apart from You we are fallen and wicked. We know that without Your righteousness, there is no hope for us. Please help us to be able to clearly convey this to others and to stand firm on the message that without You we stand exposed and condemned. May You be praised for providing a way of reconciliation and restoration. Amen.

The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.
Revelation 20:13

The previous verse noted that "the dead were judged according to their works." What was recorded of their lives is brought forth for them to face in the final judgment. With that stated first, the categories of where the dead are is only now noted, beginning with, "The sea gave up the dead who were in it."

There is, as with everything in Revelation, debate as to what "the sea" means. Is this the literal sea, or is it a symbol of the nations that has previously been used? In this case, it is probably the literal sea. There is no need to allegorize this. The Old Testament makes a distinction between those who died on the land from those on the sea. Though poetic, Jonah equates drowning in the sea to the pit –

> "The waters surrounded me, *even* to my soul;
> The deep closed around me;
> Weeds were wrapped around my head.
> **6** I went down to the moorings of the mountains;
> The earth with its bars *closed* behind me forever;
> Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,
> O LORD, my God." Jonah 2:5, 6

It is probably for the reader's benefit that a distinction is noted concerning the dead in the sea. Those who fail to understand the Lord's authority over all things might assume that those who died in the sea would be safe from final judgment. Such is not the case. In noting this, it is an assurance that all who drowned in the Flood of Noah, and throughout the ages, will be included in the tally. Along with those in the sea, it next says, "and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them."

In Revelation 1:18, Jesus is said to possess the keys to Hades and Death. These entities are noted again in verse 6:8. Here, like in 6:8, they are being personified. In this verse, they are treated as if they are living entities that have control over the souls of those who have died in time past. But if Christ has the keys to them, then He is the one with ultimate control over them. As such, John next notes, "And they were judged, each one according to his works."

It is a repeated thought from the previous verse. All people, regardless as to who they are, when they lived, or where they died, will be gathered together for the final judgment before God. Their deeds will testify to their lives, and they will be judged with the perfect judgment of God.

Life application: The sea is noted along with Death and Hades to ensure us that there is no place from which the souls of men will not be searched out for judgment. Those who died in the waters, reaching back even to the Flood of Noah and those who died in the earth, all will be resurrected for judgment.

Every human who has ever existed is remembered by God and will be brought before the great white throne. Death has not separated them from this final act because man

was made to be a soul/body unity. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul describes the soul without a body as "naked." In order for man to be in a state which is suitable for judgment, it appears their soul will be reunited with a real, physical body.

Those who are not found in the Lamb's Book of Life will find an eternity of punishment awaiting them. People who see fault in this are only finding fault in themselves. A finite sin against an infinite God demands an infinite punishment – and all have sinned.

God never changes, and His righteousness is a part of His very nature. When a sin is committed, it is a violation against that nature, and therefore it will be there in a minute, in an hour, in a day, in a year, in 1000 years, and so on for all of eternity. The sin committed *in time*, which God created, will exist as long as time exists. Time, space, and matter occurred at the same moment of creation, and so as long as space and matter exist, time will be associated with it. And because man is a physical being, the stain of that sin remains as long as that physical being remains.

Thus, there are only two possibilities to handle the sin problem: 1) That it be covered by an act of justice which will eternally satisfy God's righteousness (which is eternal), or 2) that the sin be judged and eternally punished. And there is only one act of justice that can eternally satisfy a sin against God. A suitable Substitute must be found. It must be one in the same category (an animal cannot satisfy a sin for a human) and one that is sinless (for example a baby even though it has not committed a sin has still inherited Adam's sin nature). If such a substitute is found, the penalty for sin may be taken out on that substitute.

Only Jesus was and is sinless because He was born of the Holy Spirit and a woman – no sin was transferred through a human father. And yet, Jesus is fully Man because He was born of the Holy Spirit and a human mother. Further, Jesus never sinned during His life. Therefore, He is a qualified Substitute. If the payment rendered on Jesus' cross is accepted, then the sin can never be punished again.

Because He is fully God, His atonement is eternal. His covering will continue as long as He continues, and He will continue for eternity. Despite people claiming that it is somehow unfair that Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God, it doesn't change the fact that Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God. And unfairness is a non-starter because "all have sinned," and thus what is fair is that all go to the Lake of Fire; that is fair.

Anyone who doesn't go to the Lake of Fire receives mercy because of what Jesus did. Anyone who doesn't come through Jesus will receive what is already due them. The

judgment at the great white throne is one of "works." Therefore, there are two possibilities. The first is to have suitable works –

> "Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.'" John 6:29

The second is to have unsuitable works –

> "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. … Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." Romans 3:20 & 28

The greatest sadness to be found in this judgment will be in those who have trusted in their own goodness and good deeds to justify themselves in the sight of God. They will come into His presence assured of their own righteousness, and they will be severely disappointed when the gavel comes down in judgment against them because of an issue they never thought through – the inherently fallen state of man in the presence of pure holiness.

If you have never accepted Christ's righteousness, today would be a good time to do so. Eternity is a very long time, and the Lake of Fire is a very unpleasant destination. Be sure to come to God through His offer of peace and reconciliation. Come to Him today through JESUS!

Jesus, we know that we are unworthy of Your goodness and the gift of Your righteousness, but we accept it by faith. Cover us with Your precious blood. In this, we know that we will be eternally secure from the righteous judgment that we are due. Thank You for Your white garments of righteousness that allow us to be restored to God. Thank You Jesus, thank You. Amen.

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.
Revelation 20:14

In the previous verse, it noted the sea giving up its dead and Death and Hades delivering up the dead in them. That was in order to judge those in them. With that complete, John now provides a description of an amazing finish to this process saying, "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire."

Again, Death and Hades are being personified. These great foes of humanity are now facing their own demise – never to be seen again for all eternity. John's words are perfectly in accord with Paul's words found in 1 Corinthians 15 –

> "The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death." 1 Corinthians 15:26

Death, the great enemy of mankind, will be destroyed. Hades, the place where the dead resided, will also be destroyed. As death will no longer reign in man, there will never again be a need for storing the souls of the dead. In this, John says, "This is the second death."

Some manuscripts repeat the previous words as an explanation and for emphasis –

> "Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire." BSB

The proverbial saying "Born twice, die once; born once, die twice" is seen in this verse. For all who come to Christ and are born again, there is only one death to be anticipated. For those who never come to Christ, they will see death someday, and they will also be a part of the second death when they are cast into the Lake of Fire along with Death and Hades. But understanding the process requires thought concerning death.

Considering the Greek of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:26, light will now be shed on what Paul was conveying. The verb he uses for "will be destroyed" is in the present indicative middle or passive voice. And so rather than "will be," the action has already begun, and it will continue on until a fixed point.

A good way to understand it would be to consider a major league baseball team that has no chance of winning the pennant. They have lost the right to play in the World Series, and yet they continue to play because other teams still have a chance. Until the baseball season is ended, they continue in order to meet a set plan which was initiated at the beginning of that season. Though they are defeated, their defeat will continue until the plan is finished.

Therefore, Paul is conveying the thought that Death "is being destroyed until it is finished." Further, there is a definite article in front of "death." Therefore, "death," like in Revelation, is being personified by Paul. Tyndale's version renders the verse, "Lastly, Death the enemy shall be destroyed."

In support of the ongoing (and yet inevitably completed) nature of the action, several pertinent verses from the New Testament which concern the work of Christ should be reviewed. These are only a few among many which show us that Death is defeated, but that it will continue in this defeated condition for a set amount of time. First, from Paul's second letter to Timothy –

> "...but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel..." 2 Timothy 1:10

Paul shows that in Christ's first appearance death was abolished. However, death still exists as is quite evident from the world around us. To understand this, again think of the baseball team that has no chance of winning the pennant, and yet, it still plays during the regular season. And so even though this action is done, it is awaiting a future fulfillment.

In Hebrews 2, it is seen that it was through Christ's death that this came about. In this, "death" is tied in with the devil, showing that it is the devil who had "the power of death" –

> "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebrews 2:14, 15

Next, in John's first epistle, he shows that death is tied to sin. This takes us back to the very beginning when the devil deceived the man. In so doing, man sinned. In this, death entered the world. As the wages of sin is death, it shows that the work of the devil is what brought death about –

> "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8

Jesus Christ came to undo this. He accomplished it at the cross, destroying the power of the devil in all who believe. But why didn't He just toss the devil into hell right then? The answer is that He is building a church out of the redeemed of the world. After that, He will fulfill the Old Testament prophecies promised to Israel during the millennium.

If He simply destroyed the devil at that time, there would be no church and thus no "living temple." There would also have been unfulfilled prophecies promised to Israel. Instead, the victory was won, but the devil has been allowed to continue in the world until a time determined by God. In this, we can think of the team that will eventually win the pennant. It is comprised of people who are winners, but they are not winners until the end of the season.

Those who come to Christ are "in Christ" and can never die again. But those who are not will both physically die and be eternally separated from God in the process, because Death continues to reign over them. Thus, we see why there is an ongoing nature to the work of Christ. But some wondrous day, even Death will be eliminated forever. As John says, "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

Life application: In John 3:16, we read the wonderful words, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

How can life be eternal? Eternal life is guaranteed because God will destroy death and also the place of death, known as Hades. Hades is the place where the lost go now, and it is the repository of those lost souls. After the final judgment of those in Hades, it will be thrown into the lake of fire because there will be no more need for it.

The logical deduction to be made from John's words is that, if death is no longer present and Hades is also no longer present, those who are alive in Christ can no longer die. The promise given by Jesus is realized in its fullness. However, it can be *assured* to any person willing to accept it right now.

God has spoken and what He has said is more certain than the ground under our feet. He has given His word, which cannot be broken, that all who look to the Son – believing in His work and accepting what He has done for them – will never die. Though our bodies may wear out, and though they may cease to function, our souls will continue forever, waiting for the moment when they are reunited with eternal bodies. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:54, 55 –

> "So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 'O Death, where *is* your sting? O Hades, where *is* your victory?'"

God has a marvelous plan for the people of the world if they will only accept it by faith. There is no other way to be reconciled to Him, except for faith in what He has already done through Jesus. When we believe that gospel message, and proclaim with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, God is pleased to call us His own and grant us eternal life.

If you have never accepted the gift of eternal life, now is the time of God's favor and today is the day of salvation. Don't wait another moment but call out to JESUS!

Lord, we are fully convinced that Your word is true and that what it proclaims will come about exactly as You have stated. We trust in Jesus alone for our salvation, and we are confident in the promise of eternal life that You have offered through His shed blood. What a great and marvelous God You are! Hallelujah and amen.

And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.
Revelation 20:15

With the judgment noted since verse 11 complete, John finishes the chapter with words of finality, saying, "And anyone." The Greek reads, "And if any." It is conditional, but it is also all-inclusive for those who are found in such a category, which is that they are "not found written in the Book of Life."

As noted, it is all-inclusive and there will be no exceptions. To not be written in the Book of Life means that such a person will be "cast into the lake of fire."

No categories are stated. Thus rank, title, ethnicity, age, status, amount of wealth, number of good deeds accomplished, and so on, are not considered. One is either registered in the Book of Life, or he remains dead in sin. He is "condemned already" according to Jesus' words of John 3:18.

The words are to be taken literally, just as the thousand-year period that began the chapter is to be taken literally. There is eternal life for those who are saved, and there is the lake of fire for those who are not. This is what the word declares.

Life application: In the end, all humans have eternity to look forward to. Some will receive eternal life, and some will receive eternal death. Death is what separates. It separates souls from bodies, it separates loved ones physically, it separates people in a spatial sense, and it separates us through time – only a memory is left, but nothing tangible.

However, the second death isn't the end of those who are cast into the lake of fire. Rather it is an eternal separation from God – the Source of life. Because there is no life, there is only eternal death. And during this time of eternal death, there is only suffering and corruption. Because God is the source of goodness, there can only be an eternal movement away from goodness and to corruption and terror.

Jesus used the term *Gehenna* to describe this place of eternal destruction. *Gehenna* is the Greek translation of *ge-hinnom*. *Ge* is a valley and *Hinnom* is the name of the valley. This valley, which is a deep ravine running along the side of Jerusalem, was where the most wicked and idolatrous practices were conducted, including that of child sacrifice to the pagan god Molech.

Some have identified this type of sacrifice to Molech as a giant bronze statue that was heated from the inside. When it was fully heated, babies were placed on the hands of Molech and burnt to death as an offering. This and other wicked practices were conducted in the land that God had chosen to be for His people, just outside of His dwelling. But they rejected Him and went their own way, committing what is violent and deserving of destruction.

After the return of the people from the Babylonian exile, the Valley of Hinnom became the garbage dump of Jerusalem. People would carry out all the filth of the city and dump it into fires that burned day and night, consuming the refuse. This is the picture that Jesus portrayed concerning the lake of fire and its eternal destruction. It is a place outside of where God dwells, it is a place of putridity and corruption, it is a place of absolute evil (evil being the absence of that which is good), and it is a place where the fire never dies.

The Bible proclaims that hell is real, and hell will be the final destination of any who die apart from the Person of Jesus Christ. There is a Book of Life and there is a way to be included in this book. The choice is clear, and the choice is ours. God doesn't force hell upon His people, nor does He, as reformed theology teaches, force heaven upon them. He leaves the choice up to each person who hears the gospel message.

God has granted man free will, and He has given us the ability to perceive what is good and right and what is evil and wrong. In the end, hell will be a self-inflicted punishment for those who reject the gospel. It will be a choice that the offender will eternally regret.

> "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live." Deuteronomy 30:19

Be wise. Call out to God through His offer of peace. Call out to Him through JESUS.

Oh God, the horror of considering an eternal separation from You is more than we can imagine. We shudder at the thought of being forever in a place of horror and corruption, never again sharing in Your glory even in the slightest way. We call out to Jesus and accept His gospel of peace. We receive all of His goodness and all of His promises now. We know that it is only through Him that we can avoid the second death, and so we choose Jesus. Amen.

CHAPTER 21

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Revelation 21:1

With the great white throne judgment recorded at the closing of the previous chapter, Chapter 21 now opens with the words, "Now I saw." This is John's normal way of introducing a new subject. It is as if his eyes have been watching a screen display the future and a new vision is presented on it. And what he beholds is "a new heaven and a new earth."

The idea of a new heavens and a new earth was presented by Isaiah millennia ago –

> "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
> And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.
> **18** But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
> For behold, I create Jerusalem *as* a rejoicing,
> And her people a joy.
> **19** I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
> And joy in My people;
> The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her,
> Nor the voice of crying." Isaiah 65:17-19

Peter speaks of this as well –

> "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. **11** Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **12** looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? **13** Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." 2 Peter 3:10-13

The main question that consistently arises with these words is whether this means a literal new creation, or something that has a newness of appearance. Charles Ellicott notes –

"There are two words which are translated new in our English version: one of these (*neos*) relates to time; the other (*kainos*) relates to quality. The one would be applied to what had recently come into existence; the other to what showed fresh features. ... Now, it is this latter word which is used throughout this chapter, and, indeed, throughout the book of Revelation. The newness which is pictured is the newness of freshness: the old, decaying, enfeebling, and corrupting elements are swept away."

The same word, *kainos*, is used by Peter in his words cited above. As this is so, it would then tend to refer to the same creation that has been made over in newness. This would correspond to the word "regeneration" used by Jesus about this matter –

> "So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" Matthew 19:28

This would also correspond to the words of Paul in Romans 8 where he speaks of the creation being delivered from bondage. The idea, then, of a new heavens and new earth leans toward the thought of a renewal. Despite this, being dogmatic about what lies ahead is futile. Whatever the Lord has planned will be revealed in due time. For now, John continues with the words, "for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

These words do not provide any further clarity concerning the matter of a regeneration or a completely new heavens and earth. John simply notes that what exists right now will no longer be what is. If a renewal is being referred to, there will be such a marked change in what is seen that it will be completely new to the beholder. In this great change, John notes explicitly as the first major difference, "Also there was no more sea."

Of this, the Greek more literally reads, "And the sea is no more." This again brings in a great deal of dispute about the nature of John's words. In Scripture, there is the literal sea. However, there is also that which the sea represents – chaos, the nations of the world, and so on. As the land is fixed and firm, the sea is fluid and changing – just like the fluidity of the nations of the world as opposed to God's government which is fixed and firm.

With this in mind, the argument is, "Is this referring to the literal sea, or is it referring to the chaotic and changing form of nations and government?" Two different views can be considered –

“Some explain the sea as the ungodly world. I cannot help thinking this interpretation forced. According to this explanation, the passage is in the highest degree tautological.” Vincent’s Word Studies.

“Among the more detailed features of the new earth, this obliteration of the sea stands first. It is strange that so many commentators should vacillate between literal and figurative interpretations of the chapter; the ornaments and decorations of the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10-21) are treated as symbolical; the annihilation of the sea is considered as literal. It is wiser to leave the literal meaning to the future, and to grasp the spiritual teachings, which are of infinite and present interest.” Charles Ellicott

Vincent leans to the literal meaning in order to avoid an obvious tautology. Ellicott doesn’t deny a literal meaning, but does note that the spiritual meaning is more likely what John would be referring to at present.

Ellicott’s analysis displays a particular wisdom in regard to the nature of Revelation. When John sees God “sitting on a throne,” he is not actually seeing God sitting on a throne. Rather, he is seeing a meaning that is being conveyed for us to understand a truth. When John sees a new heavens and a new earth that has no more sea, he is being presented with a truth about what lies ahead.

Whether there will be actual seas or not is not the point of what is being conveyed. The truth that God’s government is the only government that will exist is the presentation we are to consider. There will be nothing vacillating or changing about this eternal rule. It is in this chapter that the New Jerusalem will be described. That is the seat of government, and it is the focus of what the nations will be guided by. Hence, what John is seeing may have a literal aspect to it, but it is the truth behind the words he states that should be considered first and foremost.

What was lost in Eden – a state of perfection and of communion between God and man, with God as the rightful Head – will again be realized.

A point to consider is that there was a literal sea in Genesis 1, and it was declared “good” by God. As such, then there is no reason to think that a literal sea couldn’t be found in what God will be doing in the new heavens and the new earth. If there is, then “sea” is only referring to the chaos that the nations of the people generate. Again, this is all speculation. In due time, the redeemed of the Lord will know and appreciate exactly what the Lord is conveying to John in his vision.

Life application: As time has not yet reached the point where the debate concerning the events of Revelation fully come to pass, it would be presumptuous to be adamant about something we really cannot know. Different verses in both testaments can be used to come to different conclusions. Ecclesiastes, along with other books of the Bible, says the earth will abide forever. Isaiah 65:17 speaks of a "new heaven and a new earth," but then it goes on to say in verse 20 that people will die when that comes about. Therefore, what Isaiah is speaking of is a new economy existing in the old creation.

Psalm 102:25, 26 (which is quoted in Hebrews 1) speaks of the heavens and the earth being changed like a garment; one wearing out and being replaced by another. This seems to indicate a complete change with nothing of the old left.

Hence, different verses lead to different conclusions, and we simply cannot be adamant either way. God is God and He will accomplish everything in His word exactly as it should be, whether we fully understand it now or not.

In the end, whatever the fulfillment is, it will be glorious. As we move through the final two chapters of Revelation, we will see the wonderful majesty of what God will be doing for His people in this new heaven and new earth. Stay tuned, marvelous things lie ahead because of what God has done for us through His Son, our Lord JESUS!

Lord God, though we can only look ahead and speculate about many things Your word reveals, whatever the outcome is, we know that it will be wonderful. There will be a place for Your redeemed that will be without any corruption, any defilement, or anything wicked or impure. How wonderful that will be and how we long for that glorious time! Thank You for the promises Your word holds for us. Amen.

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Revelation 21:2

In the previous verse, the new heaven and new earth were seen by John. The verse now says, "Then I, John." As a note on these words, some manuscripts do not have John's name in this verse. Rather, it simply says, "And I saw..." Either way, the source is still clear. John is the one having the vision which is that he "saw the holy city."

The idea of the holy city is one that is unique and set apart. It is the ideal that has been set forth throughout Scripture. It is that which the author of Hebrews says the faithful of the ages have anticipated –

> "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. **14** For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. **15** And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country.* Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Hebrews 11:13-16

This city is then said by John to be "New Jerusalem." Earthly Jerusalem has been set forth as the ideal of where God dwells with man. It is the location where access to Him is found acceptable. This was seen in Genesis 14 with the introduction of Melchizedek who was "priest of God Most High." From there, the earthly Jerusalem was slowly developed as the place of this access and fellowship with God. However, it is merely an ideal set forth of a greater hope that Paul refers to in Galatians 4 –

> "For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— **25** for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— **26** but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all."
>
> -Galatians 4:24-26

So important is this concept of New Jerusalem, that the author of Hebrews completely contrasts access to it with Mt Sinai, meaning the Law of Moses. The access is not through the law, but through Jesus –

> "For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, **19** and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. **20** (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." **21** And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, 'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.')
> **22** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, **23** to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, **24** to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel." Hebrews 12:18-24

Understanding these few key points, John now says that New Jerusalem is "coming down out of heaven from God." This city will be described as a bride in verse 9. As such, there is an intimate connection of the city to the Lord that is being conveyed. A city represents the people in the city, and thus, those people who reside there are ultimately what is being referred to. The city bride is for the people of God who are united to the Lord.

As it is coming down out of heaven, it signifies that it is something that is not man derived. In other words, Babel started on the earth and was built up toward the heavens. God rejected that approach, demonstrating that man's works are insufficient to reach Him. On the other hand, New Jerusalem has a heavenly source. Charles Ellicott rightly states, "The world will never evolve a golden age or ideal state. The new Jerusalem must descend from God."

Access to God in the heavenly city is not man originated. Rather, it is by faith in what God has initiated and provided. Of this city, John next says that it is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." This terminology is brought forth from the book of Isaiah –

> "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
> My soul shall be joyful in my God;
> For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
> He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
> As a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments,
> And as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels." Isaiah 61:10
>
> "For *as* a young man marries a virgin,
> *So* shall your sons marry you;
> And *as* the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
> *So* shall your God rejoice over you." Isaiah 62:5

What John's eyes are beholding is the anticipation of man since his fall. It is free, full, and unfettered access into the presence of God once again. It is "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10) where man can forever delight in what God has provided through the giving of His Son.

Of note is that the author of Hebrews refers to this city as being for everyone whose hope was in the Messiah. This includes the entire list of those from the Old Testament noted in Hebrews 11, and it includes those of the church today. It will include the tribulation saints, and it will include the redeemed of the Lord during the millennium.

The hope of the New Jerusalem is the hope of man's return to what was lost. God is doing one overall thing for all of the people of the world, even if it occurs during different dispensations. The book of Revelation is detailing this hope for those in the church from the early establishment of the church, through the church age, into the tribulation period, and then into the millennium. To say otherwise makes the book of Revelation a curious oddity that has no true relevance or application concerning the eternal hopes and desires of those of the church who have set their eyes, hearts, and affections on Jesus.

Life application: Throughout the Bible there are two contrasting cities which God has used to lead us to understand who He is, what is right, what is wrong, and what the blessings of following Him properly – or the curses of failing to follow Him in a right manner – are. These two cities are Babylon and Jerusalem.

Babylon is a picture of chaos, false religion, disorder, and fighting against God. It is the location where God's people were sent when they were disobedient. It is also the location where His people mourned as they waited to return to their city of peace, Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is a picture of the idea – of harmony, right religion, order, and peace with God. It is the hope and the aspiration of the people of God – to live in her, to walk in her, to exult in her because of her direct connection with the Creator. It was considered an honor to have been born there –

> "The Lord will record,
> When He registers the peoples:
> 'This *one* was born there.' Selah" Psalm 87:6.

Even the stones and the dust of Jerusalem are considered precious to God's people –

> "For Your servants take pleasure in her stones,
> And show favor to her dust." Psalm 102:14.

In the book of Revelation, we have seen God's triumph over Babylon. Her destruction is complete, and she will never rise again. In Revelation 20:9, we saw a final attack against earthly Jerusalem that was thwarted by God, and after that came the great white throne judgment.

When this occurred, heaven and earth fled from the presence of the Lord. Then, in the first verse of chapter 21, we saw "a new heaven and a new earth." This implies that the

Jerusalem that exists now will be gone in the renewal of creation, but it is not the end of the ideal set forth by earthly Jerusalem.

There is the true Jerusalem awaiting the saints of God. It is a place that is only pictured by the Jerusalem that now exists. It is the hope and the anticipation of all who anticipated Christ's coming, or who have called on Him since He came. Being a resident of the city implies citizenship in that city. Paul speaks of that in Philippian 3 –

> "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." Philippians 3:20, 21

This city is the spot where God will dwell with men. A marvelous description of it will be given in the verses ahead. It is a city *for* the people of God, and it is built *of* the people of God. Peter speaks of us as "living stones" in a spiritual house, and Jesus says that those who overcome will be made "a pillar in the temple of My God."

What God has prepared for His people will be astonishingly glorious. He is the Architect of this building, and He has been preparing it since the beginning of time. When we behold its marvel and glory, there will be no thought of what exists now. It will be a city of such marvelous wonder that we will never tire of it, even throughout eternal ages.

Until we arrive in the New Jerusalem, we look to the earthly Jerusalem, knowing that Jesus will return there to fulfill His plan for the ages. Only when that plan is fulfilled will the true city of peace be realized. And so, let us follow the admonition of the psalmist and pray for the city of peace. When peace returns to Jerusalem, it will be because the King has returned to dwell in her midst.

> Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
> "May they prosper who love you. Psalm 122:6

This is the wonder and delight that lies ahead for the redeemed of the Lord. But in order for there to be the redeemed of the Lord, there must be the Lord who redeems. Thank God for our Redeemer, JESUS!

Lord, when we think of the glory that is coming and the heavenly city which You have prepared for Your people, we stand in awe and in anticipation of that wondrous day. Until it comes, help us to shine forth Your light to this world and let others see the great hope is in us, leading many to desire the same – to Your glory we pray. Amen.

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. Revelation 21:3

The New Jerusalem was seen to be descending from heaven. With this, John now says, "And I heard a loud voice from heaven." This is the voice of the Lord making the jubilant proclamation. It is to be understood this way, and some manuscripts say it explicitly –

> "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying." ESV

Instead of "from heaven," it says, "from the throne." Either way, it is the Lord who is calling out the words. As such, He is "saying, 'Behold the tabernacle of God is with men.'"

This is the last use of the word *skéné*, or "tabernacle," in Scripture. It signifies a tent, booth, dwelling, and so on. At times, it refers to the tabernacle constructed in Exodus. That was given as a type, or representation, of the coming Christ. That is made perfectly evident in Hebrews 9. There the tabernacle was described by the author, and then he states that it was only a representation of Christ Himself –

> "But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation."
>
> -Hebrews 9:11

For example, a part of the tabernacle of Exodus was the veil. The author of Hebrews explicitly states that the veil was a picture of Christ's body in Hebrews 10:20. A cognate noun, *skénos*, is used to describe the body of the believer in 2 Corinthians 5:1 and 5:4. And the verb form, *skénoó*, is used when referring to the action of Christ "tabernacling" or "dwelling" among us in John 1:14. That verb form will also be used in this verse of Revelation now.

In fact, every single detail of the tabernacle, from the ark to the menorah and from the table of showbread to the brazen altar, points to the Person and work of Jesus Christ. It exudes with pictures of the grace of God in Christ to be revealed in His coming and in the giving of the New Covenant for the people of the world.

The words of Revelation now tell us that this "tabernacle of God" is speaking of Jesus, not the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is where man will dwell with Jesus. He is the tabernacle, or dwelling, of God. He is Emmanuel, or God with us.

This idea is expressed in Ezekiel 37 to some extent. During the millennium, Israel was promised that the Lord would place his sanctuary among them. The sanctuary was the entire complex of the tabernacle. The tabernacle is what was in the midst of the sanctuary. As such, Ezekiel says –

> "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore." Ezekiel 37:28

The idea is similar here. New Jerusalem will come down and be the place where the Lord will reside with man. As John next says, "and He will dwell with them."

Here, the verb form is *skénoó*, which was introduced in John 1:14, is now used for the last time in Scripture. Christ came and "tabernacled" with his people in His first advent. He will dwell among Israel during the millennium, and now we see that He will dwell with man in the New Jerusalem. He is the full expression of God, and thus in His dwelling among His people, we will have the fulness of the Godhead in bodily form – endlessly and ceaselessly revealing God to us. This continues to be revealed in John's words, saying, "and they shall be His people."

The redeemed of the Lord, from all ages and dispensations, will be brought forward to dwell with God forever. Jesus – the incarnate Word of God – will forever reveal the unsearchable riches of God to His people. Again, this is perfectly expressed as the verse finishes with, "God Himself will be with them *and be* their God."

God is omnipresent, and so there is no time that we are not in the presence of God. What John is referring to is the fullest expression of God in a single spot. This was once said to be in the tabernacle –

> "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." Exodus 25:8

> "You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits *shall be* its length and a cubit and a half its width. **18** And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. **19** Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it *of one piece* with the mercy seat. **20** And the cherubim shall stretch out *their* wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim *shall be* toward the mercy seat. **21** You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. **22** And there I will meet with you,

> and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which *are* on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel." Exodus 25:17:22

That spot, between the cherubim, was the focal point of God's meeting with Man. A study of the ark of the covenant clearly reveals that every detail points to Christ Jesus. With this in mind, that which only anticipated Him is seen in its fulness in Him. This is what these earthly types and shadows only anticipated. It is Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of them, and it is He who is being referred to in John's words here in Revelation.

Life application: The message of this verse is one of absolute wonder, and it has been the true heart's desire of the people of God since the moment we were sent out of the Garden of Eden.

Before that dismissal, the Lord walked with man (Genesis 3:8) and there was face-to-face fellowship. However, that was destroyed through sin. Now the restoration of that loss is finally being fully realized.

Israel was given an anticipatory taste of restoration with the giving of the tabernacle. That is seen in Leviticus 26:11, 12 –

> "I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you.
> **12** I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people."

This was the foreshadowing that God was providing at that time. He was hinting to us that this edifice was to be His dwelling place as a picture of the true Tabernacle, Jesus. He is the embodiment of God in human flesh. God has progressively brought man back to the point of full fellowship through these various stages of Him revealing Himself.

First was full access in the Garden. That was lost. Then came the various developments of restoration through the tabernacle, the Incarnation, the Transfiguration, the millennial reign, and then the final restoration of full and unfettered access to Him once again.

In these incremental steps, we are seeing how God is working in and through history, continuously and clearly unveiling His progressive plan of both redemption and restoration.

When the New Jerusalem comes, we will be there in His presence forever. The unveiled Tabernacle of God will be with men. The time of restoration anticipated by Adam and Eve and every person desirous of an intimate relationship with God since then will be realized in full measure.

As the writer and theologian C.S. Lewis stated, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." And this is true. There is a desire in the hearts of humanity that will only be fully realized when we see the face of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. When we do, and when we dwell with Him, we will receive the fullness of what He has always intended for His people.

There will be the beauty of what the psalms anticipate; there will be the majestic fulfillment of what the prophets proclaimed; and there will be the ending of the yearning of the anxious human soul. At that time, we will behold God's Messiah forever and ever.

Hold fast to this true and sure promise. Know now and understand that the temporary trials and sadness of this world will be utterly forgotten when we stand in the presence of Jesus and behold the beauty of the Lord.

Until that day, God has sealed us with His Holy Spirit as a guarantee of this wonder to come. We are asked to "be filled" with the Holy Spirit and that can only come by allowing Him to take over and be our Light, Guide, and Helper in this earthly walk, waiting upon the realizations of our hope. And that Hope will never disappoint. He is JESUS!

O Lord, there is no greater hope in our souls than to see You and to dwell with You in complete fellowship and peace. Until that time, fill us with Your Holy Spirit and keep us from sins that only hinder our fellowship. We long for the day of eternal joy in Your presence! Amen.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:4

The previous verse noted that the people of God will dwell with Him. They will be His people, and He will be with them and be their God. In this precious position of intimacy, it next says, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

It is an indication that in the renewed state, there will be no reason to weep. For God to wipe away our tears signifies that He will remove anything that would cause tears to come forth. That is then explained by the next clauses, beginning with, "there shall be no more death."

This great enemy of man has been cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14). As such, death will no longer be a consideration, nor will it come to mind again. Death resulted from the entry of sin into the world, but it couldn't hold Jesus. This was impossible because He was born without sin, and He never sinned after His birth. In Romans 6:23, it now explains that we too can have what He accomplished because He offers to be our Substitute –

> "For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

At this point in time, death is defeated in God's people, but it is allowed to run its course until the time of renewal. But someday, as Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 15:54, death will be swallowed up in victory. This is the state that is promised to those who are in Christ. As such, John next says, "nor sorrow."

The Greek word is *penthos*. It actually goes beyond sorrow. It is a sorrow that cannot be hidden from sight, thus it is a state of mourning. It is well described by the state of Nehemiah when he stood in the king's presence. The king could openly see the condition of Nehemiah's soul –

> "Therefore the king said to me, 'Why *is* your face sad, since you *are* not sick? This *is* nothing but sorrow of heart.'" Nehemiah 2:2

Such a state as this will never be seen again. It is to be replaced with an eternal joy of the Lord filling the souls of the redeemed. Along with this, John says, "nor crying."

The word is *kraugé*. It signifies "clamorous screaming (shrieking) that is extremely boisterous, like a wounded person emitting 'unearthly' (non-human) types of sounds" (HELPS Word Studies). This goes beyond the mere crying of joy or sadness, but it extends to the emotions that well up in a person overwhelmed with grief. This will be gone forever, never to be remembered again. Further, John says, "There shall be no more pain."

This is one of the great enemies of man's joy, and it is that which can rob us of concentration, sleep, and the ability to perform properly. It can even take away our

capacity to utter praises to God. Pain can be so overwhelming that it destroys anything of value in our day, including the ability to simply function normally.

Pain was introduced into the narrative in Genesis 3:16 when the Lord God noted that the woman would bring forth children in pain. From that first mention of it, the idea of pain permeates Scripture, and it permeates the human experience – both in physical and emotional ways. This foe is defeated in Christ, and it will be realized some wonderful day. It is a sure promise from our God who cannot lie.

All of these things will be gone and forgotten because "the former things have passed away." The idea here is that an entirely new state of existence will be ushered in. That which exists now will come to an end, the way of things will close out, and a new economy that is completely new will be realized.

It should be noted that there were those who were punished with the seven bowls of God's wrath in Revelation 16, and they faced all of the evils that the redeemed in this verse will never again face. A contrast is made to the judgment of those who fail to come to God, and the joy of those who put their trust in Jesus Christ.

Life application: In a mere brushstroke of the magnificent panorama of what John's words signify, we can revisit passages from the Bible that show us where we were, where we are, and thus the glory of what lies ahead.

There is coming a time when the eternal joy intended for man will be finally realized. In the psalms, David acknowledges his life of tears, but that God is aware of every one of them –

> "You number my wanderings;
> Put my tears into Your bottle;
> *Are they* not in Your book?" Psalm 56:8

Some beautiful day that bottle will be opened and poured out never to be remembered. The Book of Life will overcome the death and anguish of the soul in God's redeemed. This will be realized when death is forever removed from the equation.

If we accept Christ's work, then we move from Adam to Jesus. Our sinful state is crucified along with the Lord, and we are granted His sinless perfection. It is completely just, and it perfectly satisfies God's righteous standard.

Because of this, sorrow will forever be removed from man's existence. As noted above, pain entered into the narrative in Genesis 3:16, but that is also where sorrow is first mentioned –

> "To the woman He said:
> 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;
> In pain you shall bring forth children;
> Your desire *shall be* for your husband,
> And he shall rule over you.'" Genesis 3:16

The bride of Adam received these woes because of his disobedience. The bride of Christ will forever have them removed because of His obedience. This is the hope that we possess because of God's goodness to us in Christ.

From the first moments of life apart from God, sorrow entered humanity and it has been carried by each subsequent generation. Mourning and sadness have overwhelmed life and have sent many even to the point of suicide. This, in turn, only produces more grief. Such a life is an endless pit that overcomes the hearts of sorrow-laden humanity. But through Jesus' work, the pit is to be completely covered over by the endless love of God.

This work of Jesus wasn't just a trial of physical pain. Rather, it was a walk filled with sorrows and griefs as well. An example of this is found in John 11 where we see that Christ Jesus was intimately involved in the state and condition of those around Him. In order to demonstrate to us His full understanding of our situation, God took on flesh and lived a life like any of us – experiencing pain, trials, separation, and weeping –

> "Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. **34** And He said, 'Where have you laid him?'
> They said to Him, 'Lord, come and see.'
> **35** Jesus wept. **36** Then the Jews said, 'See how He loved him!'" John 11:33-36

Though the multitudes rage and strive against God, searching for fault in Him, none can truthfully say that He isn't intimately aware of our needs, emotions, and desires. The loving Creator has demonstrated His compassion for His creatures in every possible way.

Instead of directing our anger at Him for what we now experience, we should be praising Him for what He has done in Christ, and for what that means in the ages ahead. Not only will we be freed from the emotional woes that we now experience, but we

shall be free from any sort of pain – be it emotional, mental, or physical. There will be a new order of existence for God's people. It will be as He intended for us all along.

What Adam had was a taste of what we will possess, but it will be even better. You see, without the fall, without the tears, without the death, the sorrow, and the crying, we couldn't appreciate the joy. It would be like a person who had never gotten sick. Without sickness, health can't be fully appreciated. But coming out of our fall and all of the evils that resulted from it, there sprang a hope and an anticipation of something better.

That which is better, even infinitely greater, came in the form of a Baby, lived in the form of a Man, and died in the form of a Savior. By the power of the work of Jesus Christ, and through the glory of His resurrection which destroyed death, we now have the hope of eternal and unending joy. Thanks be to God for the glorious work He has worked for the sons of men. Thanks be to God for Jesus!

> "So the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
> And come to Zion with singing,
> With everlasting joy on their heads.
> They shall obtain joy and gladness;
> Sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Isaiah 51:11

Yes, indeed! Thank God for JESUS!

Jesus, thanks be to You for the marvelous work You accomplished for Your redeemed. Yes, even for me. Amen.

Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." Revelation 21:5

John just described the delightful state of what it will be like at the regeneration of all things. Now, as a confirmation that what he saw is what will certainly come to pass, he says, "Then He who sat on the throne said."

The Greek is a present participle. It says, "Then Him who is sitting on the throne." The scene is active and alive. Words will issue directly from the throne of God, meaning from the Lord Himself. They are words of confirmation concerning the vision, and they are words of surety that can be trusted by those who read them. And the words He calls out are, "Behold, I make all things new."

This is a confirmation of everything just seen. In verse 21:1, it said, “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.” That began the regeneration. Then the next three verses then described what would occur after that, including the joyous state of those who will participate in that glorious time.

The Lord Himself has promised to make all things new. An order will come that is the ideal setting for man in his walk before God. John wasn’t just imagining some wonderful place. Rather, he was being given a view into the future when all things are made new. John then says, “And He said to me, ‘Write.’”

This is the last time in the Bible that anyone is specifically told to write anything. The first time the directive was given was in Exodus 17 –

> “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this *for* a memorial in the book and recount *it* in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.’” Exodus 17:14

From that initial call for Moses to write down something specific, the Bible has followed a long and specific path, detailing the redemptive process of God. Now, the final directive is given to John, ensuring that the word will be faithfully documented as it closes out in these final two chapters. The voice finishes this verse with, “for these words are true and faithful.”

Some manuscripts say, “faithful and true.” Either way, the content of what is spoken is based upon the content of the vision. What John saw will come to pass, and the Lord confirms that it is so. The sentiment of Amos 3 is found in these words –

> “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing,
> Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.
> **8** A lion has roared!
> Who will not fear?
> The Lord GOD has spoken!
> Who can but prophesy?” Amos 3:7, 8

Some prophesy with their mouths, and some prophesy with their pens. Either way, the Lord has spoken to John, and he can do nothing but prophesy. The word is sure because the One who speaks it out is true and faithful.

Life application: There will be a new order to all things. Death and Hades have been cast into the Lake of Fire, sin (which brings about corruption and death) has been dealt with in Jesus' cross, the saints of God have received glorified bodies, and all pain has ended. The former things have passed away.

Now, because of Christ's work, these things which *could* come about *have* come about. This is the time of the realization of every hope rooted in the human soul. It is the time that God has known would come even before the original creation occurred. As noted in the previous verse, without the fall and all of its associated woes, we couldn't fully appreciate the glory of what is coming; the knowledge of it would remain hidden and obscure from us.

But there is one other thing that would have been hidden from us as well – the glory of Christ. Without pain, we cannot appreciate health. Without seeing God's wrath, we could not understand God's love. In the Garden of Eden, man lacked one thing necessary to grasp the many facets of his relationship with God – the knowledge of good and evil.

Innocence of these things implies creatures that can never understand the difference between such things. Happiness and sorrow, comfort and pain, beauty and ugliness, right and wrong, love and hate, etc., are all concepts that can only be realized when placed in the context of *contrast*. Man had knowledge, but he had nothing to use for comparison. Until Eden was lost, it couldn't be appreciated.

And so, in the ultimate display of contrast, we have the cross of Jesus Christ. Without the cross, we couldn't understand the depth and the enormity of God's wrath at sin, nor could we see the infinite scope of His love for His creatures. The cross is what provides the contrast, and therefore it is the center of God's redemptive plan. Everything that we will ever experience in our eternal state will be seen with clarity because of the cross.

Thus, Jesus' words to John can be understood in their proper context, that His words are true and faithful. The One who went to the cross is the One who is Faithful and True (Revelation 19:11). And His words reflect His being. What He says is the ultimate in surety and the epitome of truth.

In the directive for John to "write," the special revelation given directly to him is then intended for all who would read what is spoken. The content is to be taken as literal. In other words, what God is telling us concerning these things is to not be spiritualized or thought of as allegory. Instead, it is the truth of what will come about. God has spoken, He has done so clearly, and we are to accept these words at face value.

What is spoken from the throne of God is true, and it is faithful because it is uttered forth by JESUS!

Oh God! The cross... it all centers on the cross. Your love for us, Your anger at sin, Your intent to make us understand Your very heart and mind – it is all to be found in what Jesus did there. Thank You for what You have done. Thank You for the beauty and perfection of this glorious plan to reconcile us to Yourself. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.

And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.
Revelation 21:6

The Lord on the throne just proclaimed that He makes all things new. In order to demonstrate that this is not just an empty promise, the words of this verse are now provided. John says, "And He said to me."

The words are spoken by the Christ of God, Jesus. It is He who sits on the throne at the right hand (meaning the position of all power and authority) of God. And His words are, "It is done." Some manuscripts say here, "They have come to pass." Thus, it refers to the words that were promised. Either way, the words are words of surety. That which was spoken would come about is that which is now accomplished. And the reason for this is given in His next words, "I am the Alpha and the Omega."

It is the same expression first used in Revelation 1:8. As noted then, the meaning is found in the fact that these are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, comparable to saying "A to Z" in English or Aleph to Tav in Hebrew.

It thus forms an all-inclusive statement. Everything that can be expressed by the language is contained within the letters of the language. This includes the concepts of time, space, and matter. If the concept is explainable by the language, then it is included in this thought because the first and last letters are representative of the whole.

Of this, the scholars at Cambridge state, "*Alpha and Omega*] As in Revelation 1:8 .... Here, as in the former passage, it is God the Father that speaks." This is incorrect. They have arbitrarily divided the words coming from the throne into two categories – some spoken by Jesus and others by the Father. Rather, the words are all spoken by the Lord. Each time, He uses the titles necessary to explain His nature in relation to the surrounding events.

In this case, the intent is to show that He is outside of time. He was there at the beginning, creating all things. He is at the end of each successive step of the redemptive process, seeing it to its completion. Nothing has happened apart from Him, and all that has happened has occurred because He has allowed it to occur. The words spoken forth ask the reader to trust that what He says will come to pass shall, in fact, come to pass.

He next says, "the Beginning and the End." Unlike in Revelation 1:8, where the same terms were used without definite articles, they are now spoken forth with the articles – the Beginning and the End. The words convey the same general meaning as those of Paul where, in Colossians 1, he describes Christ as the firstborn over all creation (meaning prior to creation), the Creator, the Sustainer, the head of the church, the firstborn from the dead, etc. Paul's words were given to show the preeminence of Christ in all things.

The words now spoken by the Lord show the absolute existence of Christ – the "I AM THAT I AM." Nothing exists in all of creation apart from Christ Jesus because the existence of all things is derived from His eternal, unchanging existence.

With that understood, He next speaks out words that convey the very idea of man's existence, saying, "I will give of the fountain of the water of life." The existence of man is intimately tied in with water. Without it, man cannot exist. There is the thought that the waters were gathered together, and the dry land appeared. From that ground, man was brought forth. But without water, the man could not survive. These physical truths are brought forward into spiritual pictures in Scripture.

Isaiah 55:1 calls out an offer for any who thirst to come forward and do so –

> "Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
> Come to the waters."

And though it is true that man needs literal water to survive, the words of Isaiah are conveying a spiritual truth that was already set forth several times in Scripture, including in the psalms –

> "O God, You *are* my God;
> Early will I seek You;
> My soul thirsts for You;
> My flesh longs for You
> In a dry and thirsty land
> Where there is no water.

[2] So I have looked for You in the sanctuary,
To see Your power and Your glory." Psalm 63:1, 2

The thirst of the physical body is equated to a spiritual thirst that only God can satisfy. That is then more fully expressed at the coming of God's Messiah –

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."
[11] The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? [12] Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"
[13] Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." John 4:10-14

The words of Jesus to the woman at the well are then more fully explained in John 7 –

"On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. [38] He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' [39] But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given,* because Jesus was not yet glorified." John 7:37-39

The offer of the Lord spoken forth now towards the end of Revelation is actually one addressed to the people of the world who read Revelation at any point in history. The offer is made to any who will believe the message of Scripture – that God has sent His Christ to bring us back to Himself. Whoever accepts this message of reconciliation, as Jesus next says, He will give this water of life "freely to him who thirsts."

It is the thought re-expressed from Isaiah 55:1 (cited above). There is no charge for what God offers. It is a gift of grace and not of works. To work implies a wage is due. That which is free is given without accepting anything that requires wages to be paid. For those who thirst after God, the fountain of the water of life will be provided to him. The next verse will specifically explain how that is obtained.

It should be noted here that those who were punished with the seven bowls of God's wrath in Revelation 16 faced the punishment of drinking blood (16:6), symbolizing the

drinking of death. It is the exact opposite of what is promised now to the redeemed of the Lord. As in Revelation 21:4, a contrast is made to the judgment of those who fail to come to God, and the joy of those who put their trust in Jesus Christ.

Life application: What needed to be accomplished has come to pass; what was lost has been restored; that which has been anticipated has been realized. When the Lord says, "It is done," it reveals a truth to us. The fact that the words were spoken means that it is already accomplished. What we don't yet perceive because we are in the stream of time, God has already brought to pass. The very word He speaks is the indication that it is done.

When God speaks out a prophecy, such as the granting of eternal life, it is for our benefit so that we can understand what He has already determined. And because he is outside of time, it is already known by Him what the outcome of all things will be.

If God is at the beginning, then He must have been prior to the beginning in order for it to begin. He is the Necessary Being by whom all things came into existence, and apart from Him, nothing has come into being.

Further, if He is the End and God is eternal, then the End stretches into eternity as well. Because God has stated that all who believe in Jesus will have eternal life, then it must be true. There will never be a time when the true end is realized. Rather, the end is the moment-by-moment existence in the eternal state.

As a note concerning the term "Alpha and Omega," it is used four times in the Bible, all in Revelation – 1:8, 1:11, 21:6, & 22:13. The term "Beginning and End" as used in this context is stated three times, again all in Revelation – 1:8, 21:6, & 22:13. When compared between uses, they confirm (as many other things have) Jesus' deity.

He is the Lord God Almighty and the second member of the Trinity. This is an inescapable truth and one that is not to be overlooked. The entire Bible reveals this. To deny Jesus' deity is a heresy. One cannot call on Jesus as Lord if He is a created being. Rather, He is the Lord our God.

Looking at the structure of this verse, the final thought is positioned to complement the first two statements: 1) "It is done," and 2) "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." It is also a witness to the truth of Jesus' deity because only God can provide what He offers, meaning the fountain of the water of life. That offer was made in the book of John as noted previously.

As the eternal state has no end, there is the need for an eternal stream of life-giving nourishment to sustain God's people. This is the "water of life" that Jesus speaks of. Without water, all life dies. Therefore with the water of life, there can be no death. God is outside of His creation and therefore is eternally existent, but we are within it. As such, we need to be eternally sustained. This is noted in Colossian 1:17 and in Hebrews 1:3, both of which are speaking of Jesus as the One who sustains all creation. Only God can sustain what God has created. In understanding this, the words of this verse clearly present the deity of Jesus Christ.

He is our Creator, Sustainer, and Hope. This is revealed in a beautifully unique way in this verse. As we move through our eternal state, we will never tire of the wisdom and life which flows from Him. We can learn about and contemplate Him for a billion times a billion years, and yet we will still have an eternity of learning ahead of us. He is a great God, a wonderful Lord, and a beautiful Savior! He is JESUS.

Jesus, how absolutely astonishing it is to contemplate eternity and to know that we will never be able to fully grasp all that it can reveal to us about You. What a marvelous and glorious Lord You are. Hallelujah to You. Hallelujah in the highest! Amen.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. Revelation 21:7

In the previous words, Jesus said to John that He would give the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. The implication is that they have the Source of eternal life flowing to sustain them forever, and thus they will live forever. In this, there is an implication made that Jesus next explicitly states to John, saying, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things."

As a side note, some manuscripts say, "shall inherit these things" instead of "shall inherit all things." It would then be referring to those things promised in this passage (and elsewhere that are connected to the things mentioned in this passage).

Either way, one must overcome in order to receive the fountain of the water of life. This demands that we remember exactly *how* one overcomes. The subject was addressed in detail in Revelation 2:7, but it is now the last time that the word *nikaó*, or overcome, is found in Scripture. Thus, it is worth repeating again, towards the end of Revelation, to ensure the matter is properly understood. John's letters provide the necessary detail –

The words are based on 1 John 5:5 (cited below), and which are taken in connection with John's other words of that epistle. Look at how John weaves thoughts together in the book of 1 John in order to ensure that all ends are secure –

> "...whatever is born of God overcomes the world." (5:4)
> "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." (5:1)
> "He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" overcomes the world. (5:5)
> "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." (4:2)
> "...every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. (4:3).

In this, John is obviously equating "Christ" with "Son of God." The Christ is God incarnate (come in the flesh) – where the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Colossians 2:9). John is revealing that which is true and that which is false. This calls out for proper understanding because to believe otherwise is the spirit of the antichrist.

There are those who claim that Jesus is the Christ, but they do not believe He is God incarnate. Thus, verse 5:1 does not apply to them. There are those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but they do not accept that He is then fully God. Thus, verse 5:5 does not apply to them. In other words, there are sons of God recorded in both testaments – such as in Genesis 6 and Job 1. These are referring to human beings, not the divine Son of God.

There are also sons of God in the New Testament, such as in Romans 8:14 and elsewhere. These are adopted sons of God, not the Son begotten of God – meaning Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God.

One must take the words of John on a much more global scale to fully understand what he is referring to. Without doing so, a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness might appear to pass the test of one who overcomes the world. But such is not the case. Through evaluating the entire scope of what John is referring to, we find that such heretics do not pass muster, and have not overcome the world. As John asks, "Who is he who overcomes the world...?"

It is the person who will meet the qualifications he will state in a moment, but that person must meet the other qualifications which are directly tied to those words as well. John says that it is "he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." This is the person who overcomes. But he only does so if he believes that the Son of God (Jesus) is the Christ. And further, he only does so if he confesses that Jesus Christ has also come in the flesh.

If he does so, he is of God and has both been born of God and has overcome the world. If he does not confess the deity of Christ (having come in the flesh), he "is not of God." In proper theology, one plus one will always equal two. However, sometimes the equation is built upon other such simple equations. When each is properly realized, then the truth of the situation is confirmed. This is why it is so important to have a larger understanding of what John is conveying when talking with people from aberrant cults.

Also, in his words, John uses present participles, each prefixed with an article when speaking of the one who overcomes. More literally, he says, "Who now is the *one* overcoming?" The response is, "...the one believing." As noted, one can believe in a "Christ" who is not the Christ (see 2 Corinthians 11:4, for example). It is the one believing in the proper Christ, who is the Son of God – fully Man and yet fully God. In his belief, he is overcoming the world. For those who believe in the wrong "Christ," they are not overcoming anything. They are still in their sins, and they belong to this world.

To sum up this most important point of doctrine, it is to the person who trusts in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the God/Man, that overcomes. With this understood, Jesus next says of he who overcomes, "and I will be his God and he shall be My son."

Of this, Vincent's Word Studies notes, "This is the only place in John's writings where υἱός son is used of the relation of man to God." The Father/son relationship that began to be revealed in Genesis 6:2 with the "sons of God," meaning those of the line of Seth that trusted in the promise of the coming Messiah, and that is then carefully and methodically built upon throughout Scripture, is fully realized in this verse.

The promise is that any who overcomes (placing their trust in the Messiah according to the level of understanding given in any particular dispensation) is granted this Father/son relationship. The hope of returning to paradise, and of spending eternity in the presence of God, is explicitly promised in these verses of Revelation. The thing God promised in Genesis 3:15, and which He has continued to slowly and progressively reveal since then, is realized here. God, who is ever faithful to His word, sent His Christ. He has restored all to the state it was originally intended. For His redeemed, the coming of that day is as certain as the word uttered forth by Him.

These wonderful words are the final fulfillment of what Paul hinted at for any who are already in this relationship because of faith in Christ –

> "I will be a Father to you,
> And you shall be My sons and daughters,
> Says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:18

For the one who has overcome, the position is already realized. We are just waiting for the redemptive narrative to unfold, but we already possess this blessed Father/son relationship.

Life application: In the evaluation of Revelation 3:22, the promises made by Jesus to those who overcome were noted. They were made in the seven letters to the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 & 3. That list is –

1) Jesus will allow him to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.
2) He shall not be hurt by the second death.
3) He will be given some of the hidden manna to eat. Jesus will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.
4) Jesus will give him power over the nations – *"He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessel"* – as Jesus also has received from His Father; and He will give him the morning star.
5) He shall be clothed in white garments, and his name will not be blotted out from the Book of Life; Jesus will confess his name before His Father and before His angels.
6) He will be made a pillar in the temple of God, and he shall go out no more. Jesus will write on him the name of His God and the name of the city of His God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from His God. And He will write on him His new name.
7) He will be given the right to sit with Jesus on His throne, as He also overcame and sat down with His Father on His throne.

All of these things are coming to the one who overcomes. Along with that is promised the intimate Father/son relationship noted in the verse analyzed above. As noted, the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:2, is a passage speaking of the chosen line that will lead to the Messiah.

From that springboard, there is a succession of adoption which leads all the way to this verse in Revelation. The promise was made to Abraham in Genesis 17:7. Israel was proclaimed the Lord's firstborn in Exodus 4:22. They were given the promise of being His special treasure in Exodus 19:5, 6. After this was seen the confirmation of this covenant line through David in 2 Samuel 7:14. Eventually, these promises were made to the church on several occasions in the New Testament.

This Father/son relationship is made possible because of Jesus. In Hebrews 1:2, He is noted as the "heir of all things." We are called "joint heirs" with Him in Romans 8:17. We are united to God through the work of Christ. And that is based on simple faith, with nothing else added. Jesus tells us this in John 3:16, Paul states it again and again in his epistles, and finally John gave us the great and wonderful news of how to overcome in 1 John 5:4, 5 (noted above).

To be a son of God, one must look to the work of the Son of God. To overcome and reign with Christ one must look to the One who overcame and reigns with God. To be an heir of the great promises of God, one must be adopted through the Son of God. It is the most wonderful and glorious promise ever, and it comes by simple faith. Praise God for His glorious gift! Praise God for our Lord, JESUS!

Heavenly Father, how wonderful it is to be called a son of God! We, your people, accept Jesus and we come to You in faith, knowing that only through Him can we receive Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Jesus, thank You for His work, and thank You for the grace and faith You have granted us to come to this wonderful place. Hallelujah and Amen!

But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Revelation 21:8

The Lord noted those who would inherit all things in the previous verse. It is "he who overcomes." Anyone who doesn't fit into this category will have a different fate ahead of him. To give an idea of the type of people this includes, a list is provided. The idea here is that all who don't believe in and accept the finished work of Christ are a part of this list, demonstrating their actual state of lowliness, regardless of how they think of themselves.

Understanding that, Jesus begins the list of those who are disqualified. Each is in the dative case, meaning that they are the recipients of the action that will be expressed. One can think of each category being preceded by the word "for" or "to." Thus, "To this group, and to this group, and to this group there will be this consequence applied to them." As such, Jesus begins with, "But the cowardly." Hence, think of "But to the cowardly."

The idea of being a coward brings up the thought of shrinking back in fear during a time of war or the like. This is not what is being referred to. The word is *deilos*. It signifies

fearful, timid, or cowardly. The word is used in Matthew 8:26, Mark 4:40, Hebrews 12:28 (where it is translated as "godly fear"), and in this verse.

HELPS Word Studies defines the term – "properly, *dreadful*, describing a person who loses their 'moral gumption (fortitude)' that is needed to follow the Lord. / refers to an excessive fear (dread) of 'losing,' causing someone to be fainthearted (cowardly) – hence, to fall short in following Christ as *Lord*. / *deilós* is always used negatively in the NT and stands in contrast to the *positive fear* which can be expressed by 5401 /*phóbos* ("fear," see Phil 2:12)."

As it has already been noted concerning those who "overcome" from the previous verse, this cannot be referring to someone who expresses fear after salvation. It refers to one who never receives Christ out of fear of the consequences of doing so.

The next on the list include the "unbelieving." The word, in this context, is anyone who has failed to believe the gospel. As belief in the gospel is required to be sealed with the Holy Spirit, such a person is unsaved. Paul defines this in Ephesians 1 –

> "In Him you also *trusted,* after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 1:13, 14

A person who believes the gospel is sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of his salvation. Those who do not believe will not be saved. The context of Jesus' words is after His completed work and ascension. Thus, a lack of belief in the gospel is the focus of what is stated here. Next, it refers to the "abominable."

The word is a perfect participle, and it signifies "to stink." Thus, it speaks of the total corruption of the person. He is foul, detestable, and loathsome. Remembering that those on this list are given as comparisons, it is saying that those who may think they are pure and good smelling are rejected, vile, and loathsome without Christ.

Jesus next mentions "murderers." This refers to those who commit unjustified, intentional homicide. Jesus uses the verb form of this word to make a point about people's need for Him –

> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' **22** But I say to you

> that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." Matthew 5:21, 22

God looks at the heart when He evaluates man. The act of murder carries punishment, but the intent of the heart is no less convicting before God. This is true with the next category, the "sexually immoral."

The word speaks of a male prostitute. However, in the New Testament, that is given as a type of any who engages in sexual immorality. Of such conduct, Jesus uses adultery as an example of the intent of the heart –

> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' **28** But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matthew 5:27, 28

The next on this list includes "sorcerers." HELPS Word Studies defines this as "properly, a sorcerer; used of people using *drugs* and 'religious incantations' to drug people into living by their *illusions* – like having magical (supernatural) powers to manipulate God into giving them more temporal possessions."

From there, Jesus refers to "idolaters." This speaks of a server or worshiper, either literally or figuratively, of idols. Being in a congregation where Christian images, such as crucifixes, statues of "saints," and so on are served must be included in this. Without Christ's atoning sacrifice to cover one's sins, such actions merely heap up added guilt. They are no different than worshiping statues of Buddha.

Jesus finishes this list by saying, "and all liars." The word used is general in nature. It certainly includes liars, but it signifies false, deceitful, lying, and untruths.

Of these, Jesus says they "shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone." This is hell. It is a place from which there is no escape and no end. God promised full restoration to man of that which was lost. But that is conditional on the work of the Messiah. He completed His work, and all who receive Him will be saved. All who do not are included in this list of doomed souls.

Again, and as stated before, the list is given as a comparative list to show that those who have not come to Christ are like any of those mentioned in this verse. There is no gradient scale by which man can be saved. There is no bell curve. There will be no evaluations of how hard or how well someone worked. There is either being in Christ and being covered by His righteousness, or there is nakedness and exposure. Those who

stand naked and exposed before God will find their place in this lake of fire, “which is the second death.”

The second death is that spiritual death that all humans are born with. We are born physically alive, but spiritually dead. Being born again in Christ restores the spiritually dead condition to life. Not being found in Christ leaves that person dead in sin. When he dies, his spiritual condition is in an unconverted state. As such, his fate is sealed. The lake of fire becomes his eternal home. As Jesus says, “this is the second death.”

The 21st letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet, Shin, corresponds to the 21st Chapter of Revelation. Shin is pictured as the two front teeth, and it signifies sharp, press, eat, and two. However, it also represents the eternal flame. Thus, there is a contrast between the lake of fire in verse 8 and the illumination of God and the light of the Lamb in verse 23. There are those condemned to the flames, and there are those who will be illuminated by the light of God – both are eternal.

Life application: One of the most common misperceptions about Jesus is that He is a cosmic pushover and that through His work there is an “anything goes” attitude concerning our walk and conduct. This attitude leads to heretical groups and cults by the bucketful.

People who spend all their time solely in the beatitudes fail to take in the whole counsel of God. They fail to realize that the same God who thrust Adam from the Garden of Eden, who swept the world clean in the Flood of Noah, who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone, who punished the people who had stood at the base of Mount Sinai – making them wander in the wilderness until all the disobedient were dead – and who also exiled His chosen people from their land – among many other acts of judgment recorded in the Bible – is the same God who spoke out those beatitudes. He is the Lord Jesus. He is the Judge of the sins of the world, and He will cast those who fail to meet His perfect standard into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.

In the end, all of the sins of man can be forgiven, but they must acknowledge their violations of what God expects of and from His people. Only through the cleansing power of the precious blood of Christ can man be purified from these things. Let us come to the throne of grace and receive God’s offer of mercy while there is still time to do so. Let us come to JESUS.

Lord Jesus, we come before You and confess that our lives have been lived apart from You. We have committed sinful acts and deserve only God’s wrath. But we look to You for forgiveness and mercy. Thank You, Lord, for the undeserved favor You offer. Amen.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." Revelation 21:9

With the new heaven and the new earth prepared, and the prospect of eternal joy or eternal condemnation laid out, a new vision begins, that of New Jerusalem. The words of this verse are a close parallel to the words of Chapter 17. There, Mystery Babylon was introduced, and so the contrast between the two cities is highlighted by the parallel use of the words –

> "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, **2** with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.'" (Rev 17:1, 2)
>
> "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.'" (Rev 21:9)

This is a pattern that has been repeated many times in Scripture. The first is the introduction of a negative entity which is then followed by a good one. Cain and his line were introduced (Genesis 4:1), followed by Seth and his line (Genesis 4:25). The generations of Ishmael were noted (Genesis 25:2), followed by those of Isaac (Genesis 25:19). The generations of Esau were introduced (Genesis 36:1), followed by those of Jacob (Genesis 46:8).

This pattern continues on in various ways and at various times, such as introducing King Saul and then King David. The pattern defines those who are sons of Adam by nature (seeking after worldly things) and those who are sons of God by nature. The sons of God include those before the cross because of their anticipation of the coming Messiah. They also include those after the cross because of their faith in God's Messiah who has come, Jesus.

Likewise, the idea of the city opposed to God, Babylon (Babel), was first described in Genesis 11 (introduced in Genesis 10). However, the city of God, Jerusalem, was first introduced in Genesis 14 (Salem) with the introduction of Melchizedek (see Psalm 76:2).

Thus, there are these divergent concepts being explored and developed in Scripture in order to reveal what God is doing as opposed to what man is doing. The final end to

Babylon has been described, and now the introduction of the eternal city – New Jerusalem – is to be described. With this understood, John begins with, "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me."

As in verse 17:1, which of the seven angels that this is remains unstated. Therefore, the angel's identity is irrelevant. It is simply one of the seven. To John, this angel is "saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.'"

This is in contrast to the harlot of Revelation 17. A harlot is a wife to no one, but rather gives herself away to whoever will participate in her wickedness. Further, the harlot was said to sit on many waters, implying exactly the idea of harlotry. She spread herself out among many lovers, and she committed fornication with the kings of the earth and the earth's inhabitants.

In complete contrast to this, there is a bride who will receive the affections of her husband, the Lamb – Jesus. There is a united bond between the two that will last forever because of the love of God which is found in Christ Jesus.

Life application: Although a city is going to be described, the New Jerusalem, it is the people who comprise a city. In other words, what will be described may be literal, and it may be an actual edifice that God has prepared. However, as with other biblical passages, New Jerusalem is more than its material parts. Rather, it is the city of the people of God.

The bride of Christ is both the city and its people. To miss this is to miss what God has been doing since the very first pages of the Bible. Since that time, He has been working in and through history to secure for Himself a people who live by faith. This is the premise of both testaments and of every story to be found in the Bible's pages – faith that God will restore what was lost and that it will be even more glorious because it will be eternal.

The splendor and the majesty of what will be displayed in the coming verses will be highlighted with the glory of God itself. It will be more wonderful than mere words on paper can describe. If you have never called on Jesus Christ as Savior, you will have no part in this marvelous and eternal beauty, so make the right decision today, even now.

Call on Him and share in what lies ahead. Call on JESUS!

Lord, to be a part of Your glorious plan for the ages is more than our minds can grasp. To know that You have accepted us in Christ, even when we fail you, gives us the greatest hope. May we never fail to give you the praise, glory, and honor for all You have done for us. Thank You for the reconciliation You alone have provided through Him! Amen.

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,
Revelation 21:10

Having cited the angel's words, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife," John now says, "And he carried me away in the Spirit." It is a similar thought to that which came at the very beginning of Revelation when John said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." John is carried away in this heightened state "to a great and high mountain."

It is a similar experience to that of Ezekiel –

> "In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth *day* of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was captured, on the very same day the hand of the LORD was upon me; and He took me there. **2** In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain; on it toward the south *was* something like the structure of a city."
>
> -Ezekiel 40:1, 2

The intent of being taken to a high mountain seems obvious. Once there, his view would be totally unobstructed as he next beholds the scene before him. Ezekiel saw the structure of a city. It would be hard to view such a city in its total scope while standing on the same level as it. Walls, hills, trees, and so on would obscure parts of it from his view. But the Lord wanted him to see the city laid out before him. Such is the case now with John. Like Ezekiel, he next says, "and show me the great city, the holy Jerusalem."

In this, there is a slight variation in source texts. Some omit "great," and the adjective describes the word "city."

> "the holy city, Jerusalem" NASB
> "the great city, the holy Jerusalem" YLT

Either way, the intent is understood. Like Ezekiel, John is seeing Jerusalem. It is the city of God's focus, and it is the city set in contrast to Babylon. Where Babylon was a harlot

and defiled, Jerusalem is set apart to God. In Scripture, the earthly Jerusalem was used as an ideal set forth by God to represent something greater and more perfect.

At times, it did not meet up to the standard, and it was defiled by the people who dwelt there. Nonetheless, it was used as a type of that which is prepared by God, just at the earthly tabernacle was set forth based on a heavenly pattern (see Hebrews 8:3-6).

What earthly Jerusalem anticipated is what is then spoken of by Paul and by the author of Hebrews, anticipating that which lies ahead –

> "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? **22** For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. **23** But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, **24** which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— **25** for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— **26** but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all."
>
> -Galatians 4:21-26

> "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, **23** to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, **24** to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel." Hebrews 12:22-24

As such, there is the type, earthly Jerusalem, and there is the antitype, "the holy Jerusalem." Of this, John next says it is "descending out of heaven from God." Christ is the fulfillment of the tabernacle in heaven, and He descended out of heaven from God. Now is seen the fulfillment of the anticipation of the earthly Jerusalem likewise descending out of heaven from God.

The vision may be something that literally happens, or it may be that what John is seeing is a vision containing a spiritual truth. Until the New Jerusalem is actually beheld by the people of God, we can only look to the words of Revelation and speculate how much of what is to be described is literal and how much is symbolic. No matter what, it is to be a city fashioned by God, and it is to be prepared by Him for the dwelling of His people.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown immediately takes the symbolic approach and states, "descending—Even in the millennium the earth will not be a suitable abode for transfigured saints, who therefore shall then reign in heaven over the earth. But after the renewal of the earth at the close of the millennium and judgment, they shall descend from heaven to dwell on an earth assimilated to heaven itself. "From God" implies that "we (the city) are God's workmanship."

They are correct that what is being prepared will be beyond that which is to be seen in the millennium (implying that there will actually be a thousand-year reign of Christ), and that what is being expressed by John now will be after that period. Whatever it is that God has planned, it will be glorious, even beyond our current ability to grasp. John's words are given as a foretaste of what will be experienced in its fullest some wonderful day.

Life application: In Isaiah 40:9, we read these words –

> "O Zion,
> You who bring good tidings,
> Get up into the high mountain;
> O Jerusalem,
> You who bring good tidings,
> Lift up your voice with strength,
> Lift *it* up, be not afraid;
> Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

Isaiah 40 is a passage of comfort for God's people in all ages, but it is a passage that only is fully realized in the book of Revelation. Today is the beginning of that realization in a tangible way.

Although John saw New Jerusalem descending in verse 2, he will now get a close-up look at it and see the splendor of the city in detail. He is going to be provided a fuller scope of what Isaiah and so many others only saw from a distance. And then he will record what he sees as a point of hope and anticipation for the saints of God.

In Hebrews 11, we learn that the faithful believers of ages past knew this city was coming. In Hebrew 11:10, it says that Abraham waited "for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God." Later in the same chapter, when speaking of all the faithful witnesses of time past, it says that they desired "a better, that is, a heavenly *country.* Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

This heavenly city is now described as descending out of heaven from God. Imagine the city's marvel in this way – everything that we now see was created by God in just 6 days – the splendor of the mountains, the magnificent creatures of the seas, and the wonder of the secret caves of the earth with all their variety of life hidden in them. But in addition to the things we have here on earth, God also created the other planets, the stars, the constellations, the immensely vast workings of the universe… it all came from the mind of God and was ordered and established in just 6 days.

Now imagine –

> "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so,* I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. **3**And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also."
>
> -John 14:2, 3

Jesus spoke these words 2000 years ago. And since then, He has been building a city and a home for His people. If God created every wonderful thing we perceive in just 6 days, imagine the marvel of what He will present to us after His Son finishes what has taken 2000 years?

Will we truly have eternal joy? Youbetcha! It will be so marvelous and so glorious that we will never tire of what is coming. And the best part of this amazing city will be described last of all. It will be such a wonderful source of majesty that God's people will eternally revel in what they behold.

If you are tired, frustrated, overwhelmed, or just beaten down by life, then hold fast to what is promised. The joy that is coming will erase every thought of the difficulties we now face. Great is God and wonderful are His dealings with the sons of men. Thank God for what He has done for us. Thank God for JESUS!

Oh God, how glorious it will be to see the city that You have prepared for us. Each room will be lovingly fashioned by our glorious Savior. Thank You for showing John these things so that he would record them for us in our times of difficulty – sure promises to carry us through in hopes of something better – a city which has foundations of whom You are the Builder! Amen.

having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Revelation 21:11

The previous verse saw the great city, holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. John now says that it is "having the glory of God." This is more than simply having a splendor fitting of God. Rather, it is referring to having the very presence of God radiating out of it in a display of His glory. That will be explicitly stated in verse 21:23 –

> "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light."

This then is the fulfillment of what was only anticipated in a limited sense in the tabernacle and later in the temple –

> "Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. **35** And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." Exodus 40:34, 35

> "And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy *place,* that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, **11** so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD." 1 Kings 8:10, 11

The difference between the earthly sanctuaries and this is then to be stated in verse 22:4 where it says that the servants of God and of the Lamb "shall see His face." In the earthly sanctuary, the presence of the glory of the Lord could not be beheld in its fullness by those who served Him. But in the New Jerusalem, His people shall behold Him in all of His glory.

John next continues with, "Her light." The Greek reads, "Her light-giver." It refers to a luminary. It is that by which the city receives its illumination, meaning the Lamb (as is seen in verse 21:23). The glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The word used to describe this light, *phóstér*, is found only here and in Philippians 2:15 –

> "that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

Of this light, John says it "*was* like a most precious stone." In other words, just as the finest gem will radiate in the most brilliant manner, so will be the radiating of the Illuminator of God's glory as the Lamb reveals it to His people for all eternity. Of this, John next says it is "like a jasper stone."

The jasper (Greek: *iaspis*) is believed to be the same as the last stone mentioned in the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28:20. In the Hebrew there, the name is *yashepheh*. That comes from an unused root meaning "to polish." It is believed to be jasper because of the same general sounding name – *yashepheh*/*iaspis*/jasper.

Jasper stone varies in color, and the specific color is speculated on. Throughout the ages, the identification of many of the colors and stones mentioned in the Bible has become unclear. Different terms are used today than they were in the past. Because of this, various translators will identify them differently.

What jasper is today is apparently not the same as what John is speaking of here. Rather, some commentators believe it is a blue-white diamond. Whatever the exact color and nature of it, the glory of God is being reflected in this manner.

However, the symbolism speaks out what John is trying to relay. There is the light of the glory of God emanating through the color, or from the color, that speaks of His infinite perfection, glory, and holiness. Finally, of this, John says it is "clear as crystal."

The Greek literally says, "shining like crystal." The word is found only here in Scripture, *krustallizó*. It signifies "to make (i.e. Intransitively, resemble) ice ('crystallize') -- be clear as crystal" (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance).

The words John uses convey the idea of absolute brilliance, splendor, and glory. It is nothing that we can as yet fully comprehend. But someday, because of Christ Jesus, we will behold what John attempts to describe for us in Revelation.

<u>Life application:</u> The New Jerusalem will be stunningly marvelous and more beautiful than we can now comprehend. We see a glimpse of this in Exodus 24:9, 10, were the presence of God is seen on Mount Sinai –

> "Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, **10** and they saw the God of Israel. And *there was* under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in *its* clarity."

This was a mere foreshadowing of the glory that John beholds. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, the glory of the Lord is revealed in various ways, but none are as spectacular as what John conveys to us. Sinful humans cannot perceive the true glory and majesty of God, nor can mere words adequately describe it. And, therefore, only comparisons can be used. However, at some wonderful point in the future, God's full

and complete glory will be displayed to His redeemed. They will walk in His light, and they will be eternally enlivened by Him.

A time is coming when these things will be fully realized. And so now, as we walk in this darkened and sin-stained world, we can carry with us the hope of this wonderful time. But this is only true if we come to God through His offer of peace and reconciliation. The Lamb that will illuminate the glory of God in New Jerusalem is the same Lamb who first came to die in order to redeem man back to God. Without coming through Christ, no man will enter into His presence. Be sure to call out to God through His Messiah. Call out to Him through JESUS.

Oh God, when the world wears me out and there is only grief in our souls at the wickedness that surrounds us, we can overcome this feeling and stand strong in the sure hope of being in the presence of Your glory – never again to feel frustration, pain, anger, or fear. Instead, we will be perfectly content with the light of Your majesty. How we long for that day! Amen.

Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: Revelation 21:12

John continues with his description of New Jerusalem, beginning with, "And she had a great and high wall." The Greek uses a present participle – "And having a wall, great and high."

The dimensions are given in verse 21:17 as one hundred and forty-four cubits in height, but to support such a height, they would also be thick. The idea is that of complete security within, even though the gates will never be closed (see verse 21:25). The size of height and thickness are probably then metaphors for eternal security (everlasting life) promised to those who have come to Christ.

John next says it is a wall "with twelves gates." The word translated as gates, *pulón*, is a common one, but it is not the type of gate that we would think of today. Rather, it is more of a portal or passage leading from the outer area and arriving at an inner court. This passage would have a heavy gate (a large door), known in Greek as a *pulé*, at the passage entry.

As far as the number of gates, the number twelve in Scripture, according to Bullinger, "is a perfect number, signifying *perfection of government*, or of *governmental perfection*. It is found as a multiple in all that has to do with *rule*. The sun which 'rules' the day, and

the moon and stars which 'govern' the night, do so by their passage through the *twelve* signs of the Zodiac which completes the great circle of the heavens of 360 (12 x 30) degrees or divisions, and thus govern the year. *Twelve* is the *product* of 3 (the perfectly Divine and heavenly number) and 4 (the earthly, the number of what is material and organic). While *seven* is composed of 3 *added* to 4, *twelve* is 3 *multiplied* by 4, and hence denotes that which can scarcely be explained in words, but which the spiritual perception can at once appreciate, viz., *organization*, the products denoting production and multiplication and increase of all that is contained in the two numbers separately. The 4 is generally prominently seen in the *twelve*."

Bullinger's description of the number twelve, when carefully considered, beautifully explains the twelve gates of the city where God rules among men. It is where the creation meets with the Creator, and where the earthly meets with the divine. It is where access to God is through these twelve gates. John next says, "and twelve angels at the gates."

This takes the reader back to Genesis 3. Man was placed in Eden to worship and to serve his Creator. Through disobedience, he was cast out of Eden, and angels (cherubim) were placed as protectors to keep him out –

> "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— **23** therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. **24** So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.'" Genesis 3:22-24

The tabernacle, and later the temple, made a picture of this forbidden access. Both faced east, with the Most Holy Place to the west. Cherubim were woven into the veil that divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, facing outward (facing east) –

> "You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim. **32** You shall hang it upon the four pillars of acacia *wood* overlaid with gold. Their hooks *shall be* gold, upon four sockets of silver. **33** And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy *place* and the Most Holy." Exodus 26:31-33

> "And he made the veil of blue, purple, crimson, and fine linen, and wove cherubim into it." 2 Chronicles 3:14

It was this veil, representing the body of Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 10:20), that was torn when Christ died on the cross –

> "Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. **45** Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. **46** And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last."
>
> -Luke 23:44-46

The tearing of the veil (His body) is a metaphor for allowing full access into the Most Holy Place because of His shed blood. Understanding this, any who come to God, must do so through Jesus Christ. Only through Him can access be restored, because He is "the way the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

All who have come to Him have access into New Jerusalem – past these angels, through the gates, and into the Most Holy Place where God resides. Of these gates, it next says, "and names written on them."

In the Bible a name identifies more than just who an individual is. The nature and character of that which (or who) is named is expressed in the name. The very substance and qualities are seen in the giving of a name, and each name – and the use of the name – has particular meaning. These gates, then, are identified with the substance of the names they possess. As for the names, John says they are names "which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel."

The naming of the sons of Israel is noted in Genesis. Each one is given for the reason stated in the text at the time, and each anticipates more concerning the son (the tribe) later in Scripture as well. But the reason for naming the gates of New Jerusalem with the names of the tribes of Israel appears to be for exactly the same reason that Jesus is the one and only way to be reconciled to God.

Jesus descended from Jacob (who is Israel), even if He did not descend from each and every son individually. He came through this group of people, and thus it is an acknowledgment that it is through Israel that access into the city is obtained – because Jesus is of Israel. The one religious expression that allows access is the law that was given to (and agreed upon by) the people of Israel. All must meet the standard of that law, and that is only possible through the One who met its demands perfectly –

> "Keep My statutes and My judgments, for the man who does these things will live by them. I am the LORD." Leviticus 18:5 (BSB)

Christ, the Man, did the things of the law, He died in fulfillment of the law, and He died as a substitutionary sacrifice for violations under the law for any who come to Him. In doing so, atonement is provided, and propitiation with God is realized. This law, given to Israel, is the way to enter into God's presence, and it is made possible by the true and perfect Son of Israel, Jesus.

The walls and gates of this marvelous city, and access through them because of the work of the Lord, are prophetically anticipated by the prophet Isaiah –

> "In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
> 'We have a strong city;
> *God* will appoint salvation *for* walls and bulwarks.
> **2** Open the gates,
> That the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.
> **3** You will keep *him* in perfect peace,
> *Whose* mind *is* stayed *on You,*
> Because he trusts in You.'" Isaiah 26:1-3

Life application: In ancient days, before aircraft and more powerful artillery, the walls of a city were its main defense against outside attacks. Watchmen were placed on the walls, just as sailors on the top of a mast on a ship at sea would act as lookouts for enemy ships. The New Jerusalem will have "great and high walls." These walls won't be defensive though because there will be nothing to defend against. Rather, they will reflect the absolute security of the believers who dwell in the city. The mightiest power of all, the Creator, dwells there. Therefore there is the truth that eternal security is realized.

One thing to be noted is that if there are walls, regardless of the height, they are a set size. In other words, the size descriptions which will be given in the coming verses are real and literal and should be taken as such. This is a real city with real dimensions, even if it contains a wealth of spiritual truths. As noted, in the walls are twelve gates.

Throughout the Bible, it is the gates of the city where judgments are made, legal transactions occur, and where the elders sit to rule and determine legal proceedings. The angels of the gates will most likely be used for the announcement of certain occasions and maybe to announce the comings and goings of special dignitaries, as well as to provide glory to God in the presence of those who come and go between the city and the new heavens and new earth.

There is no reason to think that there won't be established hierarchies in the new order of things, and these angels will be there to handle them as well as the other matters. Isaiah speaks of a similar concept in his writings which gives us a glimpse into what the future may hold as well –

> "I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem;
> They shall never hold their peace day or night.
> You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent,
> **7** And give Him no rest till He establishes
> And till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth." Isaiah 62:6, 7

As far as the names of the sons of Israel, there is an immense amount of coded information in them that shows wisdom, harmony, and structure. An involved study of them reveals truly astonishing patterns that are fitting for the gates to this marvelous city. Everything, down to the minutest detail, will be glorious and wonderful.

What God has planned for His redeemed will be amazing, awe-inspiring, and a blessing to His people for all eternity, and it is all available to you if you will simply call out for reconciliation with Him through the giving of His Son. Do so today. Call on JESUS.

Lord, even the walls of our future home are filled with wisdom and wonder. Since this is so, how glorious will be the things contained within those walls! How we long for this time to be realized so that we can walk in Your glorious city and investigate the wonders and mysteries You have waiting for us. Thank You for this hope, O Lord. Amen.

three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Revelation 21:13

John just described the wall and gates of New Jerusalem. He now continues with the location of those gates, saying, "three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west."

The word for "east" is *anatolé*. It literally means "dayspring." It was used to describe the Messiah in Luke 1:78. It has been used twice so far in Revelation, and this is its final use in Scripture. It is an actual direction, from which one would expect the sun to rise. As such, there must be something to mark out actual directions. It would make no sense to give directions if directions no longer existed. This might seem like a pointless argument to make, but it is not. Rather, it concretely establishes that what is coming has a direction indicating the dayspring. Otherwise, the account would simply say something like "there were three gates on each side."

Likewise, the word for "west" is *dusmé*. It literally means "a setting." Thus, and by implication, it is the west – the place where the sun sets. In verse 21:23, it says of this city, "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it." This doesn't mean that there is no sun. It simply means that another source of light is always available to the city. There is a place of the rising, and there is a place of the setting. As the city is square, there is also the north and the south as well. Each direction contains three gates.

The names of the tribes situated in these four directions around the tabernacle were listed in Numbers 2. Then in Ezekiel 48, as the book closes out, the names of the tribes are listed on the gates of Jerusalem in a different order, but still in the same clockwise rotation –

- Numbers 2 – East: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun. South: Reuben, Simeon, Gad. West: Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin. North: Dan, Asher, Naphtali.
- Ezekiel 48 – North: Reuben, Judah, Levi. East: Joseph, Benjamin, Dan. South: Simeon, Issachar, Zebulon. West: Gad, Asher, Naphtali.

- The directions of the compass are presented in order as –
    - Numbers 2: East, South, West, North.
    - Ezekiel 48: North, East, South, West.

- Thus, both are listed in a clockwise rotation.

No specific names or directions are provided by John in Revelation. The point is that as there are four directions, and as each side has the same number of gates, it is an indication that people are welcome from all four points on the compass.

This is actually anticipated by Christ Jesus when dealing with a Roman centurion in Matthew 8 –

> "When Jesus heard *it,* He marveled, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! **11** And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. **12** But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' **13** Then Jesus

said to the centurion, 'Go your way; and as you have believed, *so* let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.'" Matthew 8:10-13

Such references are found elsewhere in both the Old and the New Testament, demonstrating – beyond a shadow of a doubt – that what is being presented applies to Jew and to Gentile, and it applies in every dispensation equally. Israel under law was used as a tool of instruction and for learning, not as a means to an end. In these gates, it is seen that God's grace symbolically extends outward to all people from all places, and the same access is granted to all.

Life application: Assuming that Ezekiel's description of Jerusalem is referring to the millennium, which is a possibility, in New Jerusalem there will be a layout similar to what is coming during that millennial period. During that period, as noted above, there will be twelve gates around the city of Jerusalem, but the city will be much smaller than New Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 48:35 says that the name of the city will be *Yehovah Shammah*, or "The Lord is There." This signifies that Jesus, the Lord, will sit and reign in the city. The same will be true in New Jerusalem as will be seen in the coming verses. The glory of Jesus will be fully realized then, and it will be visible to all.

As another interesting side note, and as noted above, the tribes of Israel were also aligned in named formation around the tabernacle before Israel departed Mount Sinai. The specific layout is detailed in Numbers 2 & 3. When the number of the people who surrounded the tabernacle is determined, it forms a most beautiful picture, a cross.

Throughout the Old Testament, there are shadows and pictures of the cross hidden in the details. God is meticulous in how He arranges all things. It will be no different in the New Jerusalem. He will have order and structure for us to marvel at for all of eternity.

To see this presentation of the layout of the tribes forming a cross, you can watch (or read) the Superior Word sermon entitled, Numbers 3:14-39 (A Sign in the Wilderness). In the end, everything God is doing has a set purpose, and it is intended for all of the people of the world. The redemption of man, through the cross of Christ, is at the heart of this plan. It is hoped that you will yield yourself to Him and come to Him for spiritual renewal. Yes, come to Him today through His offering of peace and restoration – JESUS.

Surely You, O God, are a God of order. The harmony and detail You have laid out in Your creation as well as in Your word can only bring us to rejoice in the things You have done.

Praises and majesty belong to You, O wonderful Lord! Thank You for all You have done for Your people. Amen.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Revelation 21:14

With the description of the wall and gates complete, John next turns to the foundations of the wall, saying, "Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations." A foundation is a support for an edifice. It is the substruction of a building upon which everything else rests. The idea of twelve foundations can be taken in a couple of ways. One is that the foundation stones would be separate stones going from gate to gate. Another is that the stones are laid one upon another.

An architectural reason for them being on top of the other would be strength. However, whatever God builds, it is going to be permanent and unyielding based on its construction. As such, either way is possible. The point of there being twelve stones, however, is based on the spiritual meaning of what is being conveyed. There may be twelve literal stone foundations, but – like everything being described – there is a symbolic and typological reason for it. That is then seen in the next words, saying, "and on them were the names of the twelve apostles."

As noted, a foundation – even if it is made up of many things – is one thing. It is that upon which everything else rests. The typology is plainly evident and can mean only one thing, but it takes care and consideration to understand it. Paul says in Ephesians 2 –

> "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner*stone,* **21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, **22** in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

The prophets – all of them, and in every word placed into Scripture – ultimately called for the message of Jesus Christ, the coming Messiah. When Christ came, the apostles spoke forth the fulfillment of Messiah's coming, and they did so in a united voice. They all proclaimed exactly the same gospel message, as is evidenced by Paul's words of 1 Corinthians 15 –

> "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. **10** But by the grace of God I am what I

am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me. **11** Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed."

-1 Corinthians 15:9-11

There is one united message which forms the basis of the apostles' proclamation, Jesus Christ. Grace through Jesus is God's one purpose of the written word. To say otherwise is a false and heretical teaching. Every detail of what is presented in the law, the prophets, the gospels, the epistles, and which is summed up in Revelation, points to the coming of Messiah and the grace of God found in Him. Everything else has been a means of instructing the people of the world that they cannot reach back to God apart from Jesus Christ.

And yet, the false teachings of deceitful liars crop up in the Hebrew Roots Movement, in the teachings of Judaizers, in the doctrine of hyper-dispensationalists, and in numerous other aberrant sects, cults, and false gospels that proclaim God is doing "more than one thing." He is not. Paul explains this "foundation" in 1 Corinthians 3 –

"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. **11** For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:10, 11

In other words, the foundation stones, upon which are written the names of the twelve apostles, are the united (single) message which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their proclamation is one. Just one message is given by the twelve apostles. The author of Hebrews repeats this same sentiment immediately after a note about Abraham, the father of justification by faith –

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; **10** for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God."

-Hebrews 11:8-10

This is the exact building that is now being described. It is the building proclaimed by the prophets, explained by all twelve apostles, and which points to God in Christ – the single, unified message of Scripture. John finishes with the note that they are apostles "of the Lamb."

The sacrificial role of Jesus Christ, meaning His death as the Passover Lamb, is the hinge upon which everything else turns. It is a single, unified message of all of the apostles. This is made plainly evident by the two noted apostles of the book of Acts, Peter and Paul, in their epistles –

> "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."
>
> -1 Corinthians 5:7

> "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; **18** knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. **20** He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, "but was manifest in these last times for you **21** who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." 1 Peter 1:17-21

Paul, referring to the Passover (the Lamb), speaks of the exact same redemption as Peter when he refers to the Lamb (the Passover). The symbolism of the foundations is as clear as crystal. And yet, false teachers throughout the world attempt to divide up the message of Christ, again and again, in order to put forth a false gospel. It is, as Paul says in Galatians 1, anathema. It is the message inspired by Satan (the devil) – 2 Timothy 2:26.

There is one gospel, there is one thing that God has been doing and continues to do, and it is reflected in the beautiful symbolism of the foundation stones of New Jerusalem.

Life application: The wall is where the gates are, and those gates are represented by the twelve sons of Israel. Thus, the wall, with its foundations, is the uniting of the message of Israel and the church. The same message which allows access to God through the people of Israel (the hope of God in Christ) is that which was then proclaimed by the apostles – the foundation which is God in Christ. There is no division between the two.

This is alluded to in Ephesians 2:11-18. In the temple which stood in Jerusalem, there was a wall of separation that kept gentiles out of a large portion of the temple area. Paul tells us in the book of Ephesians that this wall is removed in Christ –

> “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— **12** that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
> **14** For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, **15** having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is,* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, **16** and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. **17** And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. **18** For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” Ephesians 2:11-18

This is then followed up by the obvious words of Paul (cited above) concerning the foundation of “the apostles and prophets” with Christ being “the chief cornerstone.”

The foundation of what God is doing is built on this foundation. Some prophets who predate Israel – such as Abel, Enoch, and Abraham – are noted as prophets implicitly or explicitly. There are many prophets who came from Israel as well, noted throughout the Old Testament and as far as John the Baptist – “Christ is coming!” This is noted in Acts 3:24. The apostles, as noted above, proclaim the same message, Christ – “Christ has come!”

In this is the foundation of God’s household and their united proclamation of Christ. As such, one central precept of the Bible is that God uses people to proclaim His word, and it is His word that tells us of Jesus. The New Jerusalem is an eternal city for the people of God, and it is the home of the Living God who reveals Himself through the second member of the Trinity – Jesus Christ. Any attempt to divert attention away from this is to be rejected.

Another note to consider is that on the twelve foundations are written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Judas is obviously not going to be listed, but a question that then arises is “Which names will be listed?” In Acts 1, a person named Matthias was chosen to replace Judas, and in Acts 6:2 these twelve are noted together. However, Paul is the “apostle to the Gentiles” chosen by Jesus personally. Which will be listed? It is something that is left unstated.

The point of the symbolism is that of the unity of government (the number twelve). Just as there were actually fourteen sons of Israel (Jacob adopted Ephraim and Manasseh for inheritance purposes), and as those sons are variously listed in the rest of Scripture, there are fourteen named apostles (Judas, Matthias, and Paul all reckoned in this). Thus, the "names" of the sons of Israel on the gates, and the "names" of the apostles on the foundation, may not be their actual names at all, but this is simply a way of saying that the proclamation of these is united. That proclamation is JESUS.

Lord Jesus, even in Your words of revelation, you have kept things hidden from us. You do this because You are sovereign. Therefore, help us to explore Your mysteries and love Your word, but also help us to patiently wait on the unveiling of the mysteries yet to come. Thank You, Lord, for Your wonderful promises that we have and the anticipation of more to be revealed! Amen.

And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. Revelation 21:15

With the twelve foundations noted as having the names of the twelve apostles, John now says, "And he who talked with me."

Again, it is a present participle – "And he who is talking with me." John is writing as if the events are occurring for us just as they did for him at that moment. This would be the one described in verse 21:9, one of the seven angels. John is writing as if the events are occurring for us just as they did for him at that moment. Of the angel, it next says he "had a gold reed."

Several times, a man with a reed is noted in Scripture. It is an implement used for measuring. This is seen, for example, in Ezekiel 40 –

> "He took me there, and behold, *there was* a man whose appearance *was* like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway." Ezekiel 40:3

In this, the line of flax was for measuring greater distances, and the measuring rod for shorter distances. This was also seen in Revelation 11:1 –

> "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.'"

The idea of measuring an area is implied in both the building of the tabernacle and the temple as well. The measurements of those edifices are given, and thus measuring implements were used to measure with. Of this "reed" noted in Revelation, as it is gold, it would be better to call it a "rod" because the word "reed" implies something grown. This is a gold rod that is used "to measure the city, its gates, and its wall."

Instead of a reed, a wooden rod, or a line of flax, gold is used. Thus, it implies absolute purity. Nothing defiled or defiling will be seen in New Jerusalem. The measurements are taken to demonstrate the order, mathematical precision, and perfection of the edifice. In Ezekiel, the reason for the measurements is stated –

> "Son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. **11** And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple and its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, its entire design and all its ordinances, all its forms and all its laws. Write *it* down in their sight, so that they may keep its whole design and all its ordinances, and perform them. **12** This *is* the law of the temple: The whole area surrounding the mountaintop *is* most holy. Behold, this *is* the law of the temple." Ezekiel 43:10-12

There was a perfection to what was described, and Israel was to see that and understand that the wisdom of God was involved in every detail of the design. Likewise, we are given hints of what is coming in New Jerusalem to perceive the magnitude, majesty, and marvel of what lies ahead. The order and divine perfection of what is measured is to show that God has a plan, it is precise, and it is perfect in every detail.

<u>Life application:</u> God, throughout the Bible, can be noted as demonstrating order and harmony. There is both intelligence and wisdom to be found in the things He has created, not random chaos. Nothing orderly can come from what is chaotic either. Paul speaks about such knowledge in Romans 1 –

> "For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, **21** because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." Romans 1:20, 21

When we attribute order to chaos, as evolutionists do, we take the glory that God deserves and accredit it to random chance, thus bringing God's wrath upon ourselves. This is noted in Revelation because order is once again seen in the New Jerusalem. It is a

city with walls and foundations, and it is a set size, determined by God. Because the angel who is talking with John is going to measure it, the city is physical, not spiritual. Its sizes should be taken literally, even if they carry spiritual symbolism. Attempting to totally spiritualize what is provided is then contrary to what God intends for us to understand.

This is the same with other times in the Bible that Jerusalem is measured out. Along with Ezekiel 40, Zechariah 2 also speaks of measuring the city –

> "Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. **2** So I said, 'Where are you going?'
> And he said to me, 'To measure Jerusalem, to see what *is* its width and what *is* its length.'
> **3** And there *was* the angel who talked with me, going out; and another angel was coming out to meet him, **4** who said to him, 'Run, speak to this young man, saying: "Jerusalem shall be inhabited *as* towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. **5** For I," says the LORD, "will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst."'" Zechariah 2:1-5

Both accounts in Ezekiel and Zechariah are likely referring to the millennial temple and city. We are being given these specific insights and measurements as indications of reality, not spiritual truths – even if spiritual truths are contained within them.

Because of the order of both of these future cities of Jerusalem, we can also be certain of the order and harmony God is working in our lives. God isn't preparing cities of specific sizes while overlooking the number of residents that will occupy those cities. In other words, God has it all under control.

The future is known to Him, and if you have called on Him through His Messiah, He has prepared a place for you in that future. Be of good cheer, God is doing something wonderful, and that will become perfectly evident in the time to come. Trust that and be thankful to Him for making it possible through the coming of JESUS!

What comfort it is to know that in the building of a city for Your people You have considered the people for Your city! Thank You, O God, for Your attentive care of us and for the great plans You have laid out for our eternal state. What a wonderful, beautiful Creator You are! Amen.

The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Revelation 21:16

Before measuring the city, John notes that "The city is laid out as a square." The word is found only here in the Bible, *tetragonus*. It is a compound word signifying "four corners." But a four-cornered city could be rectangular or some other shape, so John next carefully defines what that means, saying, "its length is as great as its breadth."

In this, one can see calling the *tetragonus* "square" is correct. Of this, Albert Barnes rightly notes –

"It was an exact square. That is, there was nothing irregular about it; there were no crooked walls; there was no jutting out, and no indentation in the walls, as if the city had been built at different times without a plan, and had been accommodated to circumstances. Most cities have been determined in their outline by the character of the ground - by hills, streams, or ravines; or have grown up by accretions, where one part has been joined to another, so that there is no regularity, and so that the original plan, if there was any, has been lost sight of. The New Jerusalem, on the contrary, had been built according to a plan of the utmost regularity, which had not been modified by the circumstances, or varied as the city grew. The idea here may be, that the church, as it will appear in its state of glory, will be in accordance with an eternal plan, and that the great original design will have been fully carried out."

As such, it fits the thought of Paul's words where he speaks of the blindness of Israel happening until "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." God has an exact and precise listing of human souls that are set for certain purposes. Later Paul says –

> "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner*stone,* **21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, **22** in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

Building a house implies a builder of a house. And a house is built based on a plan, implying an architect. In this, the builder will know the costs, amounts of materials, and so on that are required to build the house. What God has purposed will be perfectly set forth in New Jerusalem to accommodate those who dwell there.

Even in the seemingly chaotic stream of time in which we live, where things don't seem to make any sense at all to us, God is working through those things to complete something perfect for His redeemed. With this understood, John next says, "And he measured the city with the reed."

In this, a long journey would have taken place. Rather than a line of flax or a wheel with a measuring counter on it, or even a GPS to determine the size, it says the city was measured with this golden reed (rod). The measuring would be a long journey because John says it is "twelve thousand furlongs."

A furlong is 220 yards, and so that distance would equal 2,640,000 yards or 1500 miles. However, the Greek word translated as furlong is *stadia*. A *stadia* is 607 feet long, and so the more likely distance is about 1380 miles. As it is squared, this would equate to a footprint of 1,904,400 square miles.

As such, many scholars immediately decry the size as figurative, not literal. If that is so, John could easily have said it was 20 miles square and then given the same other information. Even if symbolism is involved, there should be no reason to not assume that the size of New Jerusalem is not exactly as stated here. If all things are made new, a place for such a city to sit could easily be a part of that renewal.

With this in mind, John finishes the verse with, "Its length, breadth, and height are equal." As such, this is not just a perfect square, but it is also a perfect cube. It is a whopping amount of space. But the importance of the description takes the reader right back to Exodus 26 where the dimensions of the Most Holy Place can be inferred to be 10x10x10 cubits, or a perfect cube.

This is certainly the case in the temple fashioned by Solomon. In 1 King 6:20, it says, "The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high." This would be the Most Holy Place of the temple, again a perfect cube. The New Jerusalem is likewise a perfect cube, thus the implication is that the dwelling place of God (the Most Holy Place) is also the dwelling place of man – as was explicitly stated in verse 21:3.

The Most Holy Place, that was forbidden for anyone to enter – except the high priest, and only once a year (and not without blood) – was symbolically opened up for any and all at the death of Christ when the veil was torn upon His death. That symbolism now meets up with the reality in the New Jerusalem. And this then completes the thought of Paul from Ephesians 3:19 where the only other time the words "length," "breadth," and "height" are used in a single verse. There it says –

> "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15** from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, **16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **17** that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— **19** to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:14-19

In his words, Paul adds in "depth." There is a perfect cube coming called New Jerusalem. It encompasses the length, breadth, and height of the symbolic dwelling place of God with men, and within it – in its depth – is that dwelling place. This is where "the love of Christ which passes knowledge" will be explored for all eternity.

As God is infinite, He obviously encompasses and extends throughout all of the universe, but the place where He has chosen to dwell in the fullest sense is in this magnificent structure that was anticipated all the way back in a cubed room in a tabernacle in the desert where no man was allowed to enter, under pain of death. But through the blood shed by the One whom all of those implements of the tabernacle anticipated, eternal life is now found in the glorious, cubed edifice known as New Jerusalem – the Most Holy Place.

Life application: New Jerusalem is one big city. It will be big enough to fit the redeemed of all ages, not only because of its breadth and length, but because of its height as well. Because of Christ's cross, access to God for fallen man is restored. What is available for anyone who has called on Jesus will be realized in its fullness when the redeemed enter the New Jerusalem.

God has prepared a city with foundations for His people, and some wonderful day, we will be ushered into it and into the presence of God for all eternity. Have you reserved a room yet? If not, call on Jesus and enter into the sure promises of what He has prepared for His people. Come through the shed blood of God's Son and receive the inheritance that He offers. Yes, come today to God through JESUS.

O God! How wonderful it will be to dwell in Your presence in a city that is perfect in every detail and one that reflects Your wisdom and order. We wait in anticipation for the wonderful day when we first walk through its gates to behold the splendor of Your glory! And then, there in that beautiful place, we shall be filled with the wonder of who You are for all eternity. Amen.

Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. Revelation 21:17

The previous verse had John noting the length and breadth of the city, along with its height. The description continues with, "Then he measured its wall."

It is disputed if this is the wall of the city itself, or a wall that surrounds the city. Verse 21:12 seems to indicate a separate border wall. For now, the description says it is "one hundred *and* forty-four cubits." The number 144 is the twelfth number in the Fibonacci series. If this is the actual wall of the city, it is referring to its thickness. The "gates" of the city would be within that thickness, leading to the inside of the city.

Or it could be referring to the height of the wall that surrounds the city. If so, it is actually a teeny border wall in comparison to the actual walls of the city. But it is still rather immense. Some believe it is actually a border wall that is twelve cubits by twelve cubits, or 144 square cubits. That would make the wall even teenier in comparison to the main walls of the city. This would not be a "great and high wall" as was noted in verse 21:12.

Either way, the wall is measured in a different scale than the city itself was. The city was measured in *stadia* ,a Greek unit, but the wall is measured in the unit *péchus*, another Greek unit, meaning cubits. It is a Hebrew measuring system where the measurement goes from the tip of the middle finger to the bend in the elbow, or about eighteen inches, though its actual length is debated. In Hebrew, it is called the *amah*, or "mother" measurement. As the wall's gates are according to the names of the children of Israel, this could be the reason a Hebrew measuring system is used. As far as the use of the cubit, John says it is "*according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel."

Various ideas about what this means are given. A few are –

"It is to be the dwelling-place of men; and even, therefore, when an angel measures it, he measures it according to the measure of a man" (Milligan).

"Men shall then be equal to the angels" (Jamieson-Faucet-Brown).

"According to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel; as men use to measure, and as this angel measured, who appeared as a man in this action" (Matthew Poole).

As can be seen, there is no great consensus as to what John is saying. Robert Young avoids the debate by translating the word literally, saying –

“and he measured its wall, an hundred forty-four cubits, the measure of a man, that is, of the messenger.”

The debates concerning these things will be settled for us someday, but John is describing what he sees, and that is sufficient for us to know that certain truths are being conveyed that will be fully appreciated by us in the future.

Life application: Whatever the provided details actually describe, it is interesting that the measurement of the walls reveals a part of the geometric pattern (Fibonacci series) which is found throughout nature This shows an underlying wisdom and intelligence that is not readily apparent.

Such unusual geometric patterns are found elsewhere in the Bible, in both the text itself and also in what the text describes. As these patterns were unknown to those who received them, we can see that there are hidden treasures from God in His word that are as rich and wonderful as His love is for the people He is speaking to. His hand is upon every detail of His creation – from the form of the galaxies to the form of seashells. His wisdom is displayed in the structure of DNA, and it is revealed in each radiant new sunrise.

It is good to search out the mysteries of the universe, and it is good to search out the mysteries of the Bible as well. In so doing we learn more about the mind of God and the enormity of His wisdom. Let us never become so dulled in our thoughts that we could assume we have learned all there is to know about the Bible. Should we do this, the greatest treasure God has given us would sit gathering dust when it could be used to gather even more understanding of His glory.

So, pick up the word, read it, study it, and cherish it. Above all else that it contains, the main subject of it is God working in the stream of time and within the framework of creation to bring us back to Himself, and He is doing that through His Messiah, our Lord JESUS.

O God, give us the desire to pick up Your word, read Your word, and search out its mysteries all the days of our lives. Help us to use the gifts You have given us in a way that will bring out its hidden secrets. Yes, astonish us, O God, with Your wonderful word! Thank You for the Holy Bible. Amen.

The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. Revelation 21:18

John continues describing New Jerusalem, saying, “The construction of its wall.” The word translated as “construction” is found only here in Scripture, *endomésis*. It refers to the material itself. One might say, “It is constructed of wood,” or “It is constructed of concrete.” In the case of the wall of New Jerusalem, it is constructed “*of* jasper.”

This is the same material noted in verse 11. As noted then, jasper (Greek: *iaspis*) is believed to be the same as the last stone mentioned in the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28:20. In the Hebrew there, the name is *yashepheh*. That comes from an unused root meaning “to polish.” It is believed to be jasper because of the same general-sounding name – *yashepheh*/*iaspis*/jasper.

Some commentators believe this refers to a blue-white diamond. Jasper was mentioned in verse 4:3 when describing the glory of God in Christ –

> “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. **3** And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.” Revelation 4:2, 3

The connection between the two, Christ and the wall, would then give its own symbolism. Believers are said to be “in Christ” numerous times in the epistles. As the wall is that which surrounds the city, it forms an obvious picture of the eternality of the salvation of the saints, and the absolute security of that salvation. This hard, impenetrable, and beautiful construction speaks out a timeless truth that the saints of the ages can hold fast to, knowing that –

> “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. **3** And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” 1 John 3:2, 3

Next, John says, “and the city *was* pure gold.” Gold is the royal metal. It is a symbol of wealth and purchasing power. In the Bible, it is used as a symbol of royalty and divinity. The city is thus reflective of the One who rules the city. Christ is the King, the divine Son of God.

Elsewhere, Peter says (1 Peter 2:5) that believers are “as living stones” and are being built up as a spiritual house. Thus, the construction of the city speaks of the connection between Christ and His people. We shall be “like” Him, and we shall be – as Paul says –

"joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). This then speaks of the sharing of believers in the glory and riches of Christ. Finally, John says the gold is "like clear glass."

The same adjective is used to describe both the gold and the glass, and it should be rendered the same in both uses, "pure gold, like pure glass." The word translated as "glass" is only found here and then again in verse 21. It "refers to any *transparent* substance (like crystal), i.e. 'see-through stones.' On both of its occasions in the NT, 5194 ('pure, transparent glass') refers to *the New Jerusalem* – 'apparently a metaphor (personification) of all the *glorified saints*, serving as *the eternal dwelling place of God'* (G. Archer)." (HELPS Word Studies).

The idea is not necessarily that the gold is see-through. It is that just as glass is bright and reflective, so is the gold. It will be so smooth and polished that it will appear like a mirror. This was anticipated in the temple that Solomon built –

> "And he prepared the inner sanctuary inside the temple, to set the ark of the covenant of the LORD there. **20** The inner sanctuary *was* twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high. He overlaid it with pure gold, and overlaid the altar of cedar. **21** So Solomon overlaid the inside of the temple with pure gold."
>
> -1 Kings 6:19-21

In New Jerusalem, everything will reflect the glory of God. John Gill's analysis of the symbolism is flowery and beautiful, saying, "the rich and happy state they will be in, as well as their purity and freedom from all sin and corruption, and the clear knowledge of things they themselves will have, and others will have of them; their hearts and actions will be open to all; nor will this gold have any rust upon it anymore, or ever be changed, and become dim."

The symbolism is given to relay spiritual truths of the glory that lies ahead for all who have come to God through His Christ.

<u>Life application:</u> The earthly tabernacle and temple were representations of Christ and of heavenly things related to Him. Each article, material, dimension, and so on were given to teach us spiritual truths about Him. They also anticipate the place where we will dwell with Him for all eternity.

If you have not read and studied the details of those earthly edifices, take time to do so. The description in Revelation gives a broad brushstroke of the glory to come, but the descriptions of the tabernacle and tent give the finer details. In them, we can see many

wonderful truths concerning God's redemptive process as it is worked out in the stream of human existence through His Messiah, our Lord JESUS.

How wonderful it will be to walk in the New Jerusalem and see what You have created! O God, we have hints of what is coming in Your word, but we can only speculate on much of the marvelous perfection of what lies ahead. Thank You for the beautiful taste of the glory to come as it is revealed in Your word! Hallelujah and Amen.

The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, Revelation 21:19

The twelve foundation stones that had the names of the apostles of the Lamb written on them are now to be further described. As John says, "The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones."

The idea being conveyed is that the foundation stones are actually composed of these gems. They are not merely bedecked with them, but it is what they are fashioned out of. Here we see a contrast to the city of Mystery Babylon noted in Revelation 17 –

> "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication." Revelation 17:4

Though she was adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls, her beauty was temporary and ended in destruction. New Jerusalem, however, is adorned with these things as well, but its foundations are solid and fixed. The city is pure, holy, and eternal. The symbolism for this goes back to a prophecy found in Isaiah –

> "O you afflicted one,
> Tossed with tempest, *and* not comforted,
> Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems,
> And lay your foundations with sapphires.
> **12** I will make your pinnacles of rubies,
> Your gates of crystal,
> And all your walls of precious stones." Isaiah 54:11, 12

Of these stones, John continues, saying, "the first foundation *was* jasper." This stone was just described in the preceding verse. In short, it is believed to be a blue-white diamond. John next says, "the second sapphire."

It is a word found only here in Scripture. The Greek is *sapphiros*, coming from the Hebrew *sappir*. It is the same Hebrew word as that which was used to describe the pavement under the feet of the Lord when Moses and the leaders of Israel had their meal on Mount Sinai after the ratification of the covenant in Exodus 24:10. The Hebrew *sappir*, comes from the word *saphar*, meaning to count. Thus, it is probably a very hard stone used for scratching other surfaces. It is believed to perhaps be a lapis lazuli.

John next notes, "the third chalcedony." The word is found only this once in Scripture. The Greek is *chalkédón*. Some say that the word comes from *chalkos*, signifying "copper" or "brass," and from *eidos*, signifying "appearance." Thus, it is copper-like in color. Others say that it is from the location Chalcedon, a town in Asia Minor where copper is mined. Thus, it is not copper-colored, but a stone from a copper area, and therefore has the green color of unrefined copper. As such, it is argued to be emerald green. Others say it is misty gray or some other color.

John continues with, "the fourth emerald." Again, it is a word found only here in Scripture, *smaragdos*. However, it is the same stone as mentioned in Revelation 4:3, which is the adjective *smaragdinos*. The name "emerald" is used to translate the third stone in the first row of stones in the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28:17. The stone noted there in Hebrew is the *bareqeth*. That comes from the word *baraq*, which means "flashing" or "lightning." That tells us pretty much nothing of value in determining what the stone there actually is, and it may or may not be the same stone as is seen now in Revelation. It is a green stone.

<u>Life application:</u> One thing to note is that "the foundations of the wall of the city" will be visible to all. In other words, they are a part of the New Jerusalem which will come down from heaven and sit on the new earth. The foundations will be above ground, not below. Therefore, they will be astonishingly beautiful to behold.

They are according to the names of the 12 apostles, and they will have a variety of beautiful colors to dazzle the senses. The meaning of the names of some of these stones has changed and the same terms have been used for a variety of different stones throughout history, so it is not entirely possible at this time to know for certain what they will look like.

These four stone foundations, along with those to be mentioned, will be wonderfully beautiful to behold. We have a city coming with foundations that will excite the eyes and stir our souls with its beauty. What is planned for the dwelling place of God's redeemed will be beyond our comprehension. But none of what we see will even compare to the marvel of beholding JESUS!

Lord Jesus, all the gems and jewels in the world couldn't compare to Your beauty. Amen.

the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.
Revelation 21:20

John continues the list of the gemstones that comprise the foundations of New Jerusalem, next noting "the fifth sardonyx." It is a stone mentioned only this one time in Scripture, *sardonux*. It comes from two words, *sardion* and *onux* (a gem). It is believed it could be either a type of agate or a red sard mixed with white onyx. However, others place it as reddish yellow and nearly orange.

Next, it mentions "the sixth sardius." This is the Greek *sardion* that was just used as the root of the *sardonux*. It was seen in Revelation 4:3 and now this is its second and last use. The sardius is generally accepted as corresponding to carnelian, and thus it is a red stone. It is reddish to blood red and is used in engravings.

After that is "the seventh chrysolite." It is only found this once in the Bible. The Greek is *chrusolithos*, coming from *chrusos* (gold) and *lithos* (stone). Therefore, it refers to yellow topaz, amber, or golden jasper.

Next is "the eighth beryl." Again, it is a word found only here, *bérullos*. It is a precious stone coming in various colors, the most common is sea-green in color. This is followed by "the ninth topaz." This stone is also only mentioned here in Scripture, *topazion*. It is what is known as the golden topaz. At times it comes in a greenish-gold tone.

Following that is "the tenth chrysoprase." It is another stone only seen here, *chrusoprasos*. Albert Barnes, via Robinson's Lexicon, notes that "It is derived from χρυσὸς *chrusos*, 'gold,' and πράσον *prason*, 'a leek,' and denotes a precious stone of greenish golden color, like a leek; that is, 'apple-green passing into a grass-green.'" It is quite probably referring to a variety of the quartz family which is apple-green and translucent. However, it could also be a type of chalcedony with a sea-green color.

After that is noted "the eleventh jacinth." Again, as is so common with these stones, this is its only use in Scripture, *huakinthos*. Thus, it is also known as hyacinth. It ranges in color from bluish to bluish-purple somewhat similar to a sapphire. It could be referring to the zircon.

Finally, it says, “and the twelfth amethyst.” This last stone is also only seen here, *amethustos*. It is glassy-type quartz which is clear purple, violet, or related color. It is a compound word, coming from *alpha* (the negative particle) and *methuó*, meaning “to be drunk.” As such, Strong’s notes that it is “(a kind of rock crystal: the best specimens are the color of unmixed wine, whence perhaps the name), believed to stave off drunkenness.”

Life application: As can be seen, there is little agreement on several of these stones, and scholars do their best to identify them based on the original Greek. Being dogmatic about what the stones is ridiculous. John used words he was aware of to describe what was before him, and that is what matters. Many commentaries have made unfounded suppositions because they are dogmatic about what is being presented.

The important point is that the colors and materials will be as John saw them, and they will be marvelous to behold. All of this beauty and variety will be wonderfully stunning to the eyes and a delight to the mind as we contemplate the purity of the foundations that are on display. It will be a flawless, radiant wonder that will provide a suitable foundation for the walls of the city where the King of kings rules His people throughout eternity.

For us, what a glorious wonder we will behold! All of the beauty and majesty of the things we will see will be a delight, but in comparison to the Lord, their beauty will hardly matter. In the New Jerusalem, we will see the Source of all of it. We will see JESUS!

Glorious God, precious stones are found in the world today, but they inevitably contain imperfections and flaws. Not only because of the nature of the stones, but because of the imperfection of the stone cutters. However, what You are preparing for the foundations of the heavenly city will be perfect and flawless. How we long to see Your glory radiating through, and reflected by, them! May that day be soon. Hallelujah and Amen!

The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass. Revelation 21:21

With the foundation stones described, John now notes that “The gates *were* twelve pearls.” This is the last time that the *margarités*, or “pearl,” is mentioned in Scripture. The gates of pearl are contrasted to those of the millennial kingdom described by Isaiah–

"I will make your pinnacles of rubies,
Your gates of crystal,
And all your walls of precious stones." Isaiah 54:12

The word used by Isaiah, translated as "crystal," is found only that once in Scripture, *eqdakh*. It is from a root signifying either cassia, or – more likely – a root signifying "to kindle," and thus "fiery." It is that which then sparkles with a fiery glow.

As for the pearl, it is used in parables by Jesus to refer to the precious teachings (spiritual truths) of the gospel. That is seen, for example, in Matthew 7:6 and 13:45 –

> "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." (7:6)
>
> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, **46** who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." (13:45, 46)

It is of note that the twelve foundation stones (written with names of the apostles) are of varied stones. As Christ is the Foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), that would speak of the manifold ministry of Christ as described by the apostles. The twelve gates are written with the names of the twelve tribes (Revelation 21:12), and the gates themselves are all alike, being twelve pearls. Despite being twelve, being each a pearl speaks of unity of entrance. There is one type of access, the spiritual truth of Christ – and Him alone – by which access is attained.

Charles Ellicott wisely notes, "It is *the* only precious stone which the art and skill of man cannot improve. The tools of the artificer may give fresh lustre to the emerald and the sapphire; but he must lift no tool upon the pearl." In this, nothing can be added onto the gospel message to make it more perfect. It is the message of God in Christ, granting access once again into His presence. With that thought in mind, John next says, "each individual gate was of one pearl."

The translation by the NKJV is lacking. The word "gates" is plural and it is in the genitive case. It more precisely reads, "severally, one each *of* the gates is out of one pearl." The precision of John's words speaks of unity of the material in the production of the twelve separate gates. There is one, and only one, gospel message that allows man access into the city.

With that understood, John next says, “And the street of the city *was* pure gold.” The gold speaks of the divine and kingly nature of the One who rules there. Everything about the symbolism speaks of the constant reminder that man will dwell with the King, walking in His presence forever. Of this gold, John says it is “like transparent glass.”

The word translated as “transparent” is found only elsewhere in 2 Peter 1:19, *diaugazo*. It is a compound word signifying “through” and “shining at dawn.” Thus, it speaks of the glory of God radiating off of it as if it is transparent. Like in verse 21:18, it does not necessarily mean that the gold is transparent, but that it is so perfect and polished that it appears as such. The radiating glory of God will highlight everything that is reflected in its surface.

The picture given is that of perfection in all ways. Nothing but pure and undefiled glory will be seen as one enters and then walks through the expanse of the city.

Life application: The words concerning the gates convey to us the truth that Jesus is the only true way of entering into the glory which lies ahead. The street of the city conveys to us the truth that God has brought us back to Himself through Christ, the divine path of restoration. The radiant shining of the street will highlight the fact that only the glory of God, without any taint of sin or corruption will be seen. Full, final, and forever restoration between God and man is realized in this marvelous display.

What God has prepared for His people will be astounding and we shall never tire of it. Great days lie ahead for those who live by faith now. So have faith. Trust that God can bring you back to Himself, and that this restoration is found in JESUS!

O wonderful God and precious Lord! What a treasure it is for our hearts to read Your word and peer with anticipation into its pages. How its descriptions stir our souls and make us excited for the glory which lies ahead. Great are You, O God, and wonderful are Your promises to the sons of Adam who are born again through Christ! Amen.

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
Revelation 21:22

After describing the city’s sizes, walls, foundations, gates, and so on, John now specifically notes a wonderful truth that he has observed, saying, “But I saw no temple in it.”

The earthly dwelling of the Lord, be it in Shiloh or some other place – even until it came to be located in Jerusalem – was noted as a place where the tabernacle/temple was.

The people came to that location to observe their pilgrim feasts in the presence of the Lord, meaning around the tabernacle/temple, but they were not allowed to enter His dwelling place – under pain of death. Only the priests could enter the Holy Place to conduct the daily affairs, and only the high priest – and only once a year on the Day of Atonement – could enter into the Most Holy Place.

Access to God by man was severely restricted. At Christ's death, that was restored through faith in Christ. However, it is only restored in the sense that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit. We have access to God in a spiritual sense, but we are not in the physical presence of Christ at this time.

In New Jerusalem, of which the earthly tabernacle was patterned after, there is no temple (meaning a separate dwelling place for God) because the city itself is His dwelling place. As seen in the measurement of the city, it is laid out as a cube, resembling the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle/temple. The entire city is set up as a dwelling place for God, but also for God's redeemed. This is what is being stated by Jesus all the way back in Chapter 1 –

> "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, **6** and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Revelation 1:5, 6

Jesus' words ultimately anticipate the state of God's redeemed in New Jerusalem, living as a kingdom of priests. The function of a priest is to serve God. And this is what Revelation 22 says those in New Jerusalem will do –

> "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. **4** They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads." Revelation 22:3, 4

Man will dwell with God, and as servants of Him, we will serve Him. The details of the service are not given, but the fact that it is so is clearly stated. The seven letters, written to the seven churches, show the church today that this is our hope and anticipation. The thought is similar to that found, for example, in Ephesians 2 –

> "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:4-6

Paul is writing to saved believers who were (and to this day are) living out lives in earthly bodies. And yet, he writes as if we are already seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. In other words, there is – to God – the already-realized state because of faith in Christ, even if we have not yet attained that state in a physical reality.

This is the force of John's words in Revelation 1. We are serving in the kingdom of God, right now, but we are also anticipating the full realization of that as well. This is why we do not need a temple today. Until we are glorified, we are God's dwelling place. And yet, we await the final result of that in the city with no temple – because the city is the dwelling place of God.

John next confirms this, saying, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." The idea of these words is that the glory of God fills the entire city, being present there for all to behold. The way this is possible is because of the Lamb. Under the Mosaic Covenant, God resides in the temple, but to have access to Him, there must be a sacrifice. The author of Hebrews explains this –

> "Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. **7** But into the second part the high priest *went* alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and *for* the people's sins *committed* in ignorance; **8** the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing." Hebrews 9:6-8

For us now, the sacrifice is complete, and God resides in us during this dispensation as we await the full and final realization of the promise (the sealing of the Spirit). That is explained as well in Hebrews 9 –

> "But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. **12** Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."
>
> -Hebrews 9:11, 12

In New Jerusalem, there is no need for a sacrificial offering because the Lamb is there. He is that full, final, and forever offering to God for the sins of the people. Christ, the God/Man, is the bridge between the two. It is He that makes this intimate and eternal fellowship with God possible. As such, there is one thing being described with two aspects to it. The Greek reads, "for Lord the God the Almighty, temple of it is, and the Lamb."

This is the last use of *pantokratór*, or "Almighty," found in Scripture. In Revelation 1:8, Christ was identified as such. He is God. But here, He is also identified as the *arnion*, or Lamb (a term consistently used of Him in Revelation). Again, He is God. And yet, they are spoken of as One in this passage. In other words, one could hold up a coin before flipping it and say, "This is the head and the tail of the bet." It is two aspects of something being used to describe that one thing.

Life application: When Jerusalem was in proper covenant relationship with God, there was a temple standing where He would meet with His people. Solomon built the first. Upon its destruction, the Jewish people were exiled to Babylon. The next temple was built by Zerubbabel. This is described in various books and passages, but Zechariah 4 gives these details –

> "The hands of Zerubbabel
> Have laid the foundation of this temple;
> His hands shall also finish *it.*" Zechariah 4:9

Although still considered the second temple, it was renovated to a large degree by Herod the Great. Eventually, the temple was destroyed again by the Roman armies under Titus in AD70, and the people were exiled for two thousand years – all due to their disobedience (meaning failure to believe – Hebrews 3:18, 19).

During this period of exile, God's presence, His Holy Spirit, has dwelt among believers individually. We are the sanctuary where God dwells among men. When believers come together in prayer and worship, we are demonstrating the unity of the body of Christ. However, this period is coming to an end at a point known as the rapture of the church. When this occurs, it will be followed by the building of a new temple in Jerusalem which will be the fulfillment of the 70th week (a seven-year period) of Daniel's vision in Daniel 9.

At the end of this seven-year period, Christ will return and rule from this same spot in the millennial temple for one thousand years. After that will come the New Jerusalem. King David looked forward to this time of intimate glory when he wrote the 27th Psalm–

> "One *thing* I have desired of the Lord,
> That will I seek:
> That I may dwell in the house of the Lord
> All the days of my life,
> To behold the beauty of the Lord,
> And to inquire in His temple." Psalm 27:4

There is one way to be allowed access into the New Jerusalem – the spot where there will be eternal joy as the saints of the ages live in the presence of God and the Lamb. It is by accepting God's offer of peace, Jesus Christ. If you have never accepted Jesus Christ, don't put it off any longer.

No one knows the day of the Lord's coming – either through death or the rapture. Because our future is unknown, we need to be ready at every moment for our date with destiny. Again, the words of David show us the hope and anticipation of this glorious time ahead –

> "You will show me the path of life;
> In Your presence *is* fullness of joy;
> At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore." Psalm 16:11

It is all made possible because of what God has done in Christ. Hallelujah to our God! Hallelujah to the Lamb of God! Hallelujah to JESUS!

Lord, what a wonderful and glorious hope we have of an eternal walk in Your presence. There is no veil that will separate us from You as in earlier times. And there will be no sin that infects us as we strive to become holy as believers now. There will only be purity, holiness, fellowship, and splendor. Thank You for what the future holds! Thank You for Jesus! Amen.

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. Revelation 21:23

Describing the glory of New Jerusalem, John had just noted that there was no temple in it, explaining why. Now, he continues by saying, "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it."

The words are reflective of those of Isaiah 60 –

> "Violence shall no longer be heard in your land,
> Neither wasting nor destruction within your borders;
> But you shall call your walls Salvation,
> And your gates Praise.
> **19** "The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
> Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you;
> But the LORD will be to you an everlasting light,
> And your God your glory.

20 Your sun shall no longer go down,
Nor shall your moon withdraw itself;
For the LORD will be your everlasting light,
And the days of your mourning shall be ended." Isaiah 60:18-20

This does not say that these heavenly orbs will not exist, but that there is no need for them. The idea takes the reader back to the very beginnings of creation –

"Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; **15** and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so. **16** Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. *He made* the stars also. **17** God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, **18** and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that *it was* good. **19** So the evening and the morning were the fourth day." Genesis 1:14-19

These luminaries were set in the heavens to "rule the day" and to "rule the night." In the state of the New Jerusalem, there will be no need for such rule because a new order of things will exist. The idea of light has various meanings including spiritual revelation and understanding, knowledge, comfort, holiness, goodness, hope, grace, and so on. None of these things will be lacking, as John notes, "for the glory of God illuminated it."

The Greek word is *phótizó*. It is a verb signifying to illuminate, bring to light, make evident, and so on. It is from the noun *phós*, meaning light, a source of light, or radiance. God's glory is what brings forth the eternal light that shines in New Jerusalem. Daniel speaks of such things –

"And He changes the times and the seasons;
He removes kings and raises up kings;
He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding.
22 He reveals deep and secret things;
He knows what *is* in the darkness,
And light dwells with Him." Daniel 2:21, 22

Jesus, speaking to the disciples, makes this comment concerning light and dark –

> "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. **10** But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." John 11:9, 10

And John conveys this note concerning light in his first epistle –

> "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:5-7

These are but a few of the many verses that refer to the nature of light and darkness. There will be no time or place in New Jerusalem where the things that light signifies will be lacking. God's transcendent glory will shine forth throughout the city, and it will dispel all darkness. This is because God's glory will illuminate the city and, as John says, "The Lamb *is* its light."

Rather, the translation should say, "The Lamb *is* its lamp." The Greek word is *luchnos*. It signifies a lamp or an "illuminator." It is Christ, the God/Man, through whom the light of God is transmitted. All of the attributes of light described above, and any that have been overlooked, are revealed in and through the light of God as it is revealed through Christ. As in the previous verse, the description of Jesus as the Lamb is given. It is through His sacrificial work that this is revealed:

- Christ died for the sins of the people, purifying all hint of darkness from them.
- Christ was buried, taking away all sin and darkness from them.
- Christ rose again, victorious over death, demonstrating that He is God and in Him there is no darkness at all.

Understanding this, there is no distinction to be made between "God" and "the Lamb" in this verse. Because Christ is God, He is the light –

> "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. **5** And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." John 1:4, 5

The same word, *phós*, is used by John to indicate both the illumination of God and the illumination of Christ Jesus. It is His deity that is being referred to.

Life application: The New Jerusalem will have a completely different order for the existence of the people of God. In our current order, we have set needs that can only be met by the existence of the sun and by the revolution of the earth, moon, etc. Everything is carefully balanced so that the sun shines a certain amount of time, and it is hidden at others. The heating of the sun causes the water to evaporate, and its light produces photosynthesis in plants. The way the earth is designed now and the way it interacts with the heavenly bodies is what keeps life going.

However, in New Jerusalem the city will have no need of such things. Those living in this city will have a completely different source of life-giving energy and it will be far more glorious than what we currently have.

Our present order works for our benefit, but it also works against us. The sun's rays can cause skin cancer. Sunbursts, which come sporadically, can affect our electric and communications infrastructure, etc. These things will no longer occur because in New Jerusalem the glory of God will be the Source of light.

As God is the Source and Creator of all things, nothing in the creation can compare to Him. Billions of constellations and billions of stars in each constellation all came from the wisdom of His mind and the power of His word. If the universe were to run down to the state of a cold dead battery a thousand times over, the power of God would still be as strong and glorious as it was at the original creation.

It is this Light and Life-sustaining Source that will illuminate New Jerusalem, with Jesus Christ as the lamp of that light. He is the One who is ever revealing the glory of the unseen God. We will see Him in all His fullness, and we will be eternally refreshed. It may be that there will be no need for sleep or eating, but eating will still be possible as there will be trees with fruit there (see verse 22:2).

In this beautiful city, we will be like the Lord in that we will be eternal, and we will be in a glorified state. There will be no sinful nature in us, and we will be eternally filled with His glory. What is coming simply can't be grasped because we now get tired, we get old, and we die. None of these things will occur and there will be existence that isn't concerned with time, haste, or stress.

This all awaits the redeemed of the Lord, and it is this glory that you too can participate in, if you will just reach out and receive God's offer of reconciliation. Reach out today for the Lamb. Reach out for JESUS!

Wonderful Lord Jesus! How we look with anticipation to the glories that lie ahead. Now, even in our most joyous moments, we know that there is an end to them and that we will again come down from the fleeting peak of exhilaration we feel. But such won't be the case when we are in Your presence. The state of awe and wonder will never end. May this day be soon! Amen.

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Revelation 21:24

Having noted the state of the New Jerusalem, being without the need of sun or moon, John next states, "And the nations of those who are saved." Some manuscripts omit the words "of those who are saved." Also, the Greek word *en* reads *dia*. Thus, it reads, "And the nations will walk by its light" (BLB).

Either way, stated explicitly or not, the implication is clear. All of those who are not saved have already been chucked into the Lake of Fire. As such, only the saved will be a part of this new, eternal economy. How they are divided into nations goes unstated, but we are given the sense that there will be an order and structure to society, just as there is today. However, it will be one that is without sin. Because of this, it will be a perfectly functioning society.

Of those groups of peoples, we are told that they will walk by (amidst) the light just described in the previous verse. The light of the glory of God will illuminate the city as it is conveyed by the Lamb, who is its lamp. With that noted, John next says, "and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it."

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown takes this to mean, "who once had regard only to their glory." In other words, these were kings during their earthly rule. The Pulpit Commentary says, "Not that there are literal kings and earth. The language is intended to convey an idea of God's supreme glory and unquestioned authority. There are now no kings to dispute his sway."

There is nothing that says that there is not a literal earth. As noted in the commentary of verse 20:13, if there are directions (east, north, south, and west), there must be something by which to mark out those directions. It implies that there is still a sunrise and a sunset and that the earth is still marked according to the directions by which that occurs.

There would also be no reason to note that there are kings if there are not to be kings. Nothing in this diminishes the glory of the King of kings. As such, there is as much reason

to consider these words as literal as to take them symbolically. However, it cannot be denied that they may – in fact – be symbolic.

It may simply mean (and it even seems likely) that all of the great people of past ages will be no different than the common people. The greatest king will bring the honor he had into the city just as the common man. The honor which was in the past is brought into this city, and it will be inconsequential to the glory of the city and especially the glory of God and the light of the Lamb.

In the end, whichever is correct, everything will be perfectly arranged and structured. We need not worry that things will be awkward, unfair, or confused. All of the redeemed will see the wisdom and harmony of God in the structure of the society.

The idea conveyed in the words of this verse are found to be originally detailed in Isaiah 60:1-14. Reading them will give insights into the millennial reign of Christ and how that will anticipate the final state of things in the eternal state. Psalm 72 also carries hints of this coming glory –

> "Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him;
> All nations shall serve Him." Psalm 72:11
>
> "His name shall endure forever;
> His name shall continue as long as the sun.
> And *men* shall be blessed in Him;
> All nations shall call Him blessed." Psalm 72:17

Each step of the redemptive narrative logically follows after and builds upon the previous step. Someday, the perfection of that which has been anticipated will be fully realized for the redeemed of the Lord.

Life application: In this verse, the term "nations" is the Greek word *ethne*. This word is also translated from the Old Testament word *goyim*, and it generally means non-Israelites, or "Gentiles." However, this isn't always the case. A good example of this is Acts 17:26 which is speaking of all people groups, Jew and Gentile alike –

> "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings…"

The same is true with the term *goyim* from the Old Testament; it is not always exclusively used when referring to non-Jewish nations. This verse in Revelation is certainly speaking in the broader sense. It includes all people groups of the redeemed of the ages united into one salvation and one access to the presence of God.

If you are like most, you are a common man or woman who is living your life without pomp and celebrity. But you are treasured and as precious to God as the greatest king who ever walked the earth. Royal robes and the jewels of a crown don't make the person. Rather, what is inside – and that which reflects God's glory – is what is of the highest value.

A person with deep and enduring faith, though poor, is far more pleasing to God than a king who questions what God has stated in His word. Have faith in what He has presented, stand fast in times of trouble, and give God the glory at all times. In this, you will be ushered into the New Jerusalem ahead of the nobles whose faith is small. God's glorious light will shine on you for all eternity.

How to be a true royal now while living out this life? Be saved by Christ, live for Christ, honor God through the giving of His Son – Christ our Lord – and at every chance you have, hail the great and exalted name of Christ. Hail the name of JESUS!

Lord, by the world's standards I am common and without fame or great fortune, but I love and cherish Your word. I stand fast on its promises, and I hold fast to how it presents You – the Creator, Redeemer, Savior, and Sustainer. I hold fast to my Lord Jesus, and I pray for continued filling of your Holy Spirit all the days of my life. Amen.

Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). Revelation 21:25

Of New Jerusalem, the previous verse said that those who enter will walk in its light and that the kings of the earth will bring their glory and honor into it. This is now further explained by the words of this verse. First, John says, "Its gates shall not be shut at all by day."

The idea of shutting a gate is for protection from harm, or the shutting out of that which is defiled or unacceptable. When Adam was cast out of Eden, cherubim were placed at the east of the garden, protected by a flaming sword "which turned every way." This was after the sixth day of creation, signifying that the intended place of rest (for worshiping and serving the Lord) was taken from the man. Instead, he would toil until he returned to the dust.

Gates are normally kept open during the day unless there is a battle going on or for some other reason. A battle has raged among humanity since his expulsion from Eden. That battle ended with the casting of Satan and those who belong to him into the Lake of Fire.

New Jerusalem will have no enemies and therefore there will never be a need to close the gates to the city to protect its inhabitants. As noted, in ancient times, this would occur during the day if enemies were spotted, but the gates were closed during the nights as a precaution because the darkness hid those who may attack.

In New Jerusalem, there will only be the realization of absolute peace and harmony within the city, and there will only be constant light within. As such, there will be permanent access to this city of God. However, as noted above, enemy attacks aren't the only reason why the gates were closed to the earthly Jerusalem. Two other reasons which are important to note will be reviewed.

First, in the time of Nehemiah, people were coming to the city on the Sabbath and trying to sell to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Nehemiah took control of the situation and mandated that the gates were to be closed throughout the Sabbath. This would preclude violations of this day of rest, symbolically taking man back to Genesis 2 where Adam was placed (rested) in the Garden –

> "So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted *some* of my servants at the gates, *so that* no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day." Nehemiah 13:19

However, the eternal state in the New Jerusalem *is* God's "Day of Rest" for His redeemed. The eternal seventh day of Genesis 2:3 is realized for God's people in the work of Jesus Christ. What was removed from Adam because of his transgression is restored through the work of Christ.

This is the reason why Christians don't have a "Sabbath" day (despite what various cults proclaim). Hebrews 4:3 explains this to us –

> "For we who have believed do enter that rest…"

In other words, faith in Christ's work is what ushers His people into God's eternal rest. We are now free from a Sabbath observance, an observance that only anticipated the coming of Christ and His restoration of our entrance into the rest Adam had lost. This

eternal day will be fully realized in New Jerusalem where the gates of the city are never closed. We will be living in an eternal state of rest from the labors of this life.

A second reason for the closure of one of the gates of Jerusalem is found in Ezekiel 44, and it takes the reader symbolically back to Genesis 3 where man was expelled from the Garden –

> "Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it *was* shut. **2** And the LORD said to me, 'This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the LORD God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut. **3** *As for* the prince, *because* he *is* the prince, he may sit in it to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way.'" Ezekiel 44:1-3

Fallen man could not enter the gate which the Lord entered. It was sanctified as holy and therefore it was sealed up. In New Jerusalem, there will be no restrictions on the people concerning the gate(s) which the Lord enters. The Apostle John explains why –

> "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." 1 John 3:2

Because of the work of Christ, we shall be like Him. We will be pure, spotless, and undefiled. Our nature will no longer bear the stain of sin; we will have moved completely from Adam to Christ. Because of this, there will be no gate that is sealed up to the believer. We will have free and complete access into this glorious city.

In seeing this, John finishes the verse with, "(there shall be no night there)." The thought is set off as parenthetical. Of this, the Pulpit Commentary says, "The gates shall never be shut, either by day or night; but it is superfluous to say, "by night," for there is no night there."

Nothing is superfluous in the word of God. The meaning is that in the city there shall be no night there. It doesn't mean that there is no night at all. If the city is descended from heaven to sit upon the earth, as is stated in the text (see verse 21:2), and if there are points on the compass by which the city is situated (see verse 21:14), and as the Greek meaning of two of those points is "dayspring" (the east), and "a setting" (the west), then there will be a sun. As there will be the rising and setting of the sun, then there will be day and night – but not in the city itself. Inside the city, which is a cubed edifice, there

will never be day and night. It is the place of the eternal Day of God's rest where the light of God will be illuminated by the Lamb, who is the lamp, for all eternity.

The symbolism is what is to be highlighted. Albert Barnes does a good job of explaining it –

"It shall be all day; all unclouded splendor. When, therefore, it is said that the gates should not be 'shut by day,' it means that they would never be shut. When it is said that there would be no night there, it is, undoubtedly, to be taken as meaning that there would be no literal darkness, and nothing of which night is the emblem: no calamity, no sorrow, no bereavement, no darkened windows on account of the loss of friends and kindred."

New Jerusalem is the return to the presence of God. It is restoration to the Garden of Eden. No longer will the cherubim's flaming sword turn in all directions to keep man out. Rather, after he has spent ten billion times ten billion years traveling the universe and searching out the wonders of God's mysteries, he can freely enter through the gates, into the very presence of God, and there experience the rest that is granted to all who simply come to Him by faith in the work of Christ Jesus.

<u>Life application:</u> Isaiah had a glimpse of the glorious time ahead during his ministry, and he must have wondered how it could be. He was under the Sabbath rules of the law, and he dwelt among a "people of unclean lips." He must have wondered and contemplated the glory which lay ahead for God's people.

> "Therefore your gates shall be open continually;
> They shall not be shut day or night,
> That *men* may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles,
> And their kings in procession." Isaiah 60:11

Isaiah wanted to know, but Peter explains that the words he wrote would only be revealed after Christ's work –

> "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, **11** searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. **12** To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who

have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into." 1 Peter 1:10-12

Now, we have the honor of knowing these things. What a blessed day we live in as we anticipate the fullness of what has been revealed to us! Thank God for what He has done. Thank God for the giving of His Son! Thank God for JESUS!

Lord God, how wonderful it is to know the glories of what lies ahead because of the work which was accomplished before in Christ Jesus. Thank You, Lord, for the cross which has granted us access to the beautiful promises of the future! May the day be soon when You come for Your people, and we behold Your glory forever and ever. Amen.

And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. Revelation 21:26

John just noted that the gates of New Jerusalem will not be shut at all by day. Now, in accord with that, he continues by saying, "And they shall bring the glory of and the honor of the nations into it." The words here continue to follow after the words of Isaiah 60:11 when referring to the millennial reign of Christ –

"Therefore your gates shall be open continually;
They shall not be shut day or night,
That *men* may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles,
And their kings in procession."

In John's words, the verb is impersonal. It simply means that whoever comes into the gates will, by entering, bring the glory and honor of their nation into New Jerusalem. It is a way of saying that they who enter are the redeemed of the Lord. This was conveyed by Jesus in Matthew 28 –

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19

Not only were Jews to be considered acceptable, but a New Covenant implies a new order of things. In this, God demonstrated that people would be brought into this covenant in the same manner as Abraham was brought in, long before the introduction of the law – by faith – and that it would be inclusive of all nations. This is further noted in Revelation 5:9, which says –

"You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;

For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

The words demonstrate that those who have been redeemed by the Lord, through His shed blood, are considered precious. This is regardless as to race, color, ethnicity, or any other distinction. Those who enter New Jerusalem are the glory and honor of the nations, even if in this current life we are often lowly and despised.

Life application: This verse closely repeats what was seen in verse 24 – "And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it." Such repetitions will often reveal to us hidden patterns within the text. This pattern is called a *chiasm*.

A chiasm is a pattern that goes in one direction and then turns around and repeats an idea in the opposite direction. There are countless chiasms in the Bible, some spanning chapters and even books or combinations of books. They are a literary form that God uses to show us a concept and how it reveals a particular thought He is conveying.

Chiasms will often be anchored on a center verse, such as the one noted below. The two "a" sections are speaking of the Lamb – first being the "light of God" and second, the One who controls life. The connection between "life and light" is a concept that is often spoken about in the Bible. The "b" section is a contrast between those who are "saved" and will walk in the light and those who are in darkness by defilement; a thought similar to the "light and life" concept in the "a" section. The "c" section revolves around those who will bring their glory and honor into the New Jerusalem. The "x" section reaffirms the notion of eternal light and that because of this the gates will never be closed.

It should be noted that the "gates" of the New Jerusalem are mentioned ten times in this chapter. Therefore, they are a highlight of the overall chapter and thus are very important to the theme of the city. The importance is then highlighted by this short chiasm.

a. The glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light.
----b. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light.
--------c. And the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.
---------- x. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).
-------- c. And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.
---- b. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie.
a. But only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

When studying your Bible, (which you should do every morning when you wake up and every evening before you sleep, and also throughout the day such as when traveling, waiting in a doctor's office, eating lunch, sitting on the beach, driving your car (audio only!), having afternoon break in the park, etc.) take time to look for such patterns in the Bible and then think on them and contemplate why they are there and what God is telling us. There are rich and wonderful treasures hidden in God's word and we should be attentive to them. He is giving us insights into His mind.

If you'd like to review the chiasms compiled at the Superior Word website, go to the search bar and type in "chiasm." It will bring up a lengthy page of such treasures. In the end, God is conveying to us wonderful truths concerning His working in and through creation in order to reconcile us to Himself. And He is doing this through the giving of His Son, our Lord JESUS.

How splendid is Your word, O God. Thank You for the treasures You have hidden in it which give us insights into what You intend for us to know. Thank You for all of the wonderful gifts You give us. How can we do anything but thank You for all we receive. Amen.

But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Revelation 21:27

The previous verse referred to bringing the glory and the honor of the nation into New Jerusalem. The words now speak of exactly the opposite, meaning that which can never enter. John begins with, "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles." The words "that defiles" are an adjective signifying "common." The same expression was used in Acts 10 when Peter was taught a lesson concerning those who are sanctified by God, even the Gentiles –

> "The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. **10** Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance **11** and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. **12** In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. **13** And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'
> **14** But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything **common** or unclean.'
> **15** And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, 'What God has cleansed you

must not call **common**.’ **16** This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.” Acts 10:9-16

The idea being conveyed in these words from Acts is that those of the nations are cleansed by God through faith in Christ. They are no longer common or unclean. Because of Christ, they may enter into New Jerusalem. But that which remains common may not. John continues with the words “or causes an abomination or a lie.”

The verb is a present participle and is rightly translated as, “or is causing.” It is an ongoing thing. The word translated as “abomination” is used for the last time in Scripture now. It is derived from a root meaning “to reek with stench.” Thus, it is that which emits a foul odor and is abhorrent and abominable. It was used when referring to Mystery Babylon in Revelation 17:5.

The word translated as “lie” signifies that which is false. To not follow Christ is, by default, to pursue that which is false. There is no other acceptable option for man to pursue. One can come to God through Christ, who is the Truth, or he follows a falsity. Such as have not come through Him are, by their very nature, abominable, and they follow that which is false.

John then explains this by saying, “but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.” To be written in the Lamb’s Book of Life is to have come to God through His offering of peace, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), and who is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

It is the sacrificial aspect of the Lord that restores fallen man to a right and propitious relationship with God. Nothing else can do so, and when a person is so cleansed, it is an act of Christ, and it is considered an eternal decree of God that he is so cleansed. Thank God for Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God!

<u>Life application:</u> This is the last verse of chapter 21, and it reminds the readers of the fallen state of mankind apart from Christ. There shall be many excluded from the glory to come.

To understand things that make a person unclean, take time to read through the Law of Moses. There you will find the Ten Commandments, but there are also a host of other laws that Israel was obligated to. The general reckoning is that there were six hundred and thirteen laws. Anyone who doesn’t meet every one of these standards perfectly violates the law because, as James notes, “...whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in on *point*, he is guilty of all.”

To be guilty before the law, or to not bear the perfection of Christ who fulfilled the law, means the soul will be excluded from New Jerusalem. So, who then can be saved? No one apart from Jesus! He summed up His first advent with these words –

> "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. **18** For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."
>
> -Matthew 5:17, 18

For those under the law, it had to be adhered to exactingly. But Jesus came to fulfill the law which we could never fulfill. And He did so. In His fulfilling of it, He then offered His life as a Substitute for the sins of mankind. It is by faith in Jesus Christ that we are cleansed from defilement.

A second category John referred to is anyone who causes an abomination or a lie. A good example of what God finds abominable is found in Luke 16:14, 15 where the same word translated as "abomination" is used –

> "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. **15** And He said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.'"

The sin of idolatry is abominable because it puts something in our hearts that is a part of creation above the Creator. Idolatry, pride, etc. are reprehensible to God because they demonstrate our priorities are not directed toward Him, but He must always be first. The lie, or that which is false, is included here because without truth there is no basis for a relationship with others. Following falsity is to reject the truth. But in God, there is only truth.

There is good news to end the chapter though. One category of humans will be granted access into the paradise that God is preparing for man. It is those who have been written in the Lamb's Book of Life. For man, it is impossible to meet the standards God has laid out. But what is impossible for man, God accomplished by coming in the form of a Man and living the life that we cannot live. Jesus is the One who met all of God's standards perfectly, and Jesus is the One who became our Substitute after doing so.

Now, by faith in what He has done, we move from fallen Adam to the risen Christ. We move from death to life. We move from condemnation to salvation. How can we not

praise the Lord who has done such great and marvelous deeds for His creatures? Hallelujah and Amen! Thank God for JESUS!

Lord God Almighty, though we have erred and strayed and done that which separates us from You, instead of destroying us, You have had compassion on us and sent Jesus. Thank You, O God for the marvelous work that You have wrought on our behalf. All glory to You, O God. Amen!

CHAPTER 22

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Revelation 22:1

John has been describing New Jerusalem and the glory that will be beheld there. With the start of the final chapter, that continues, beginning with, "And he showed me a pure river of water of life." Some manuscripts leave out the word "pure." Either way, the focus of the water is on it being "water of life."

This has already been hinted at in Revelation –

> "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; **17** for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Revelation 7:17
>
> "And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.'"
> -Revelation 21:6

The idea of "water of life" is that of vibrancy. Thus, it is that which springs forth as opposed to that which is, or has become, stagnant. One can then extend the thought to "life-giving," because it is fresh and wholesome rather than containing contaminants.

In the Greek, the words are in the genitive, giving the idea of water that itself possesses life or life-giving power. It is water that issues forth with life and provides life as it continues on. Whether the word "pure" belongs in the original or not, it would be implied. There is purity to it as it issues forth. Of this water, John next says it is "clear as crystal."

The Greek adjective is *lampros*. One can see the word "lamp" in it. Thus, it signifies brilliant, shining, etc. The waters are so pure that they are bright. The idea of "living water" is brought forth. Their purity will reflect the state of all things in New Jerusalem. It is a place where nothing defiled exists. There will be only that which is pure, and the waters will provide a continual introduction of that purity as they issue forth. And that is expected based on its source, as John next notes, saying that they are "proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb."

As God is the Source of all purity and goodness, the water issuing from His throne is a reflection of His very being and life-giving power. Noting God and the Lamb in the same context is, as it was in verse 21:22, an indication that the two are One. Both verses use articles that suggest it is singular. There is one throne and one source from which the waters issue forth.

Life application: There is an eternal river flowing from the throne of God in New Jerusalem. This takes the reader of the Bible back to the Genesis narrative concerning the Garden of Eden. There in verse 2:10, it says –

> "Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads."

When man fell through disobedience, he was cast out of Eden and from the Source of this water, even though the waters continued. These four riverheads picture the four gospels and thus point directly to Christ.

Later, at the time of the Exodus, the people were conducted through the wilderness, but were given glimpses of the true life-giving Water by the use of real-life pictures. One was when they came to Marah where the waters were bitter. In that account, it says, "So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast *it* into the waters, the waters were made sweet" (Exodus 15:25). This was a picture of the cross and thus the spiritual healing and life-giving waters of Christ.

Again, in the wilderness, at two separate times, water was made to flow from rock. One of the accounts says –

> "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." Exodus 17:6

The second time water was to come from the rock, the Lord instructed Moses to speak to the rock, not strike it. However, Moses disobeyed and was punished for this. The two accounts point to Christ under the law and Christ as the fulfillment of the law, and thus the Giver of grace. Both directly point to Christ. Paul notes this in the New Testament –

> "… all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." 1 Corinthians 10:4

All along, the Israelites received their life-sustaining power from Christ, whether they acknowledged it or not. The Bible's journey of the Water of Life continues through the

Old Testament. For example, it is referred to in Isaiah 55:1 which anticipates the work of Christ once again –

> "Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
> Come to the waters;
> And you who have no money,
> Come, buy and eat.
> Yes, come, buy wine and milk
> Without money and without price."

Another picture of Christ and His work in the redemptive narrative is found in the book of Ezekiel. It is in a prophecy of the future temple that will stand during the millennial reign of Christ –

> "Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar." Ezekiel 47:1

This water, flowing from the right side of the temple is an earthly taste of what will be realized in the eternal city, the New Jerusalem. Again, the water pictures the healing work of Christ as is described in the passage. These and other passages fill the Old Testament with a continuous stream of thought concerning Christ, the true Source of all life-giving water.

In the New Testament, we see the fulfillment of the Old Testament shadows and pictures. They are realized in the Person of Jesus. We know this from the words He proclaimed when speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob –

> "Jesus answered and said to her, 'Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.'" John 4:13, 14

In John 7, we see the correlation between Jesus' claims concerning the life-giving water and the Holy Spirit –

> "On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. **38** He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' **39** But this He

spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given,* because Jesus was not yet glorified." John 7:37-39

Now, in Revelation, the final picture of this wonderful anticipation of our being restored to paradise, where pure water of life issues forth is seen. What God offers is to be found again through the giving of His Son, Christ the Lamb. He is the One who is eternally revealing the unseen Father to us, and it is the Spirit of Christ who issues from the Father, through the Son.

This life-giving water is surely real water and a real river, but it is also an eternal reminder of the true Life which flows eternally from God to the redeemed of the world. From beginning to end, and at all points along the redemptive narrative, we are seeing God reveal Himself to us through Christ, our wonderful Lord JESUS!

O God, Your word is so rich and pure. We can see how You have tied it all together, pointing to our Lord and Savior Jesus each step of the way. We long to drink from the eternally flowing river which proceeds from Your throne and to revel in the beauty which surrounds it. May that day be soon! Amen.

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2

The previous verse noted the water issuing forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. John next notes, "In the middle of its street." The meaning of these words is unclear. Some take them together with the previous words, while others connect them with the following words –

> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life--water as clear as crystal--pouring out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, **2** flowing down the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life producing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month of the year. Its leaves are for the healing of the nations. (NET)

> And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. **2** In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. (NKJV)

Either way, the street is that which is referred to in verse 21:21, saying, "And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass." Regardless of the translation, the next words continue the thought, saying, "and on either side of the river." Therefore, what is to be stated next is either both in the middle of the street and on either side of the river (a median strip and verge strips), or only on the sides of the river (verge strips). If the former, then the river runs parallel to the street.

However the layout actually is, John next says, "*was* the tree of life." There is a river running from the throne and through New Jerusalem. There is a great street, and certainly lesser streets going off through the entire massive city. In this setting, there is this tree of life.

Albert Barnes makes the entire thought a general statement, thus saying, "that in the street, or streets of the city, as well as on the banks of the river, the tree of life was planted. It abounded everywhere. The city had not only a river passing through it, but it was pervaded by streets, and all those streets were lined and shaded with this tree. The idea in the mind of the writer is that of Eden or Paradise; but it is not the Eden of the book of Genesis, or the Oriental or Persian Paradise: it is a picture where all is combined, that in the view of the writer would constitute beauty, or contribute to happiness."

Regardless as to how the trees are placed, there will be access to them for all. This then is the true return to paradise that has been anticipated since man's expulsion –

> "The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. **9** And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life *was* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."
>
> -Genesis 2:8, 9

> "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'— **23** therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. **24** So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." Genesis 3:22-24

Man was placed in Eden where the tree of life was, a tree that would sustain him forever. However, in his disobedience, his hand was withheld from obtaining the fruit of this tree, and he was driven out of Eden and was destined to die. Now, access to the

tree is restored. Eternal life is offered to man. The way to have access to this tree has already been stated –

> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." Revelation 2:7

In other words, for those who come to Christ and are saved by Him (meaning overcoming), the offer becomes reality. Man is guaranteed this upon belief (Ephesians 1:13, 14). Someday, the offer will (not maybe!) become reality. This is a promise from God who cannot lie. With this stated, John next says it is the tree of life "which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month."

The meaning is probably not as the KJV states when it says, "twelve *manner of* fruits." Rather, it is one type of fruit that comes forth monthly, as stated by the LSV, saying, "yielding its fruit according to each month."

Bullinger notes that the number twelve signifies "*perfection of government*, or of *governmental perfection*." It "is the *product* of 3 (the perfectly Divine and heavenly number) and 4 (the earthly, the number of what is material and organic)." As such, the fruit symbolizes the union between the divine and the earthly.

The symbolism tells us that what proceeds from God is united to that which is available to man. The two stand in harmony together. As God is eternal, so man is granted eternal life in this new and permanent governmental arrangement. Along with this, John then notes that "The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations."

The idea of the symbolism here is not that there are those outside who are to be healed, but that those inside are continuously healed. As the tree bears fruit throughout the months, it means that the tree always has leaves. The idea being conveyed is seen in the words of Revelation 21:4 –

> "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Pain requires a cure to be alleviated. The symbolism of the leaves is that there is continuous healing and pain will no longer be a part of the human experience. Living in the presence of God in the New Jerusalem will be a very sweet deal.

Life application: Again, the words of this verse take the reader back to Ezekiel 47 where the comparable passage from the millennial reign of Christ is noted –

> "When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, *were* very many trees on one side and the other. **8** Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. *When it* reaches the sea, *its* waters are healed. **9** And it shall be *that* every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. **10** It shall be *that* fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be *places* for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. **11** But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. **12** Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all *kinds of* trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine." Ezekiel 47:7-12

Although there are similarities between these verses and those of Revelation 22, there are several differences between what is planned for the New Jerusalem and what will exist during the millennium. The first thing to note is the mentioning of the "Great Sea." Revelation 21:1 says that there will be "no more sea." Refer to that commentary to get a better picture of what this may allude to.

Another point of distinction is that the waters "are healed" and that the "swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt" during the millennium. There is no indication of a need to "heal" the waters in the New Jerusalem because they are a part of the new order of things that exist without any defilement. There is also no record of waters that are unhealed.

These patterns are certainly referring to is the spiritual state of things in the world. The river of Eden went into four riverheads including one called the "Gihon." During the times after the flood, the Gihon wasn't mentioned again until the time of David (1 Kings 1:33) and was only noted a few times after that. The Gihon during this period was a teeny spring below Jerusalem.

This is a picture of the teeny amount of true religion which was seen on the face of the earth, whereas the rivers Tigris and Euphrates in the area of Babylon are immense, symbolizing the immense amount of false religion on the earth; Babel picturing this false religion.

In the millennium, Isaiah 11:9 notes –

> "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
> As the waters cover the sea."

In fact, according to Zechariah 14:8, the river which proceeds from Jerusalem will be so large...

> "*That* living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,
> Half of them toward the eastern sea
> And half of them toward the western sea;
> In both summer and winter it shall occur."

This river then, issuing from the spring Gihon, is a picture of the spiritual state of the world during the millennium. However, sin and death will still be present during that glorious period, and thus, as Ezekiel notes, the comparable state of the waters at the end of the river – the "swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt."

In the New Jerusalem, the waters will flow continually for eternity, and they will be perfectly pure, without the note of unhealed waters. This then is a picture of a completely pure spiritual state. There will be no unsaved, there will be no false religion, and there will only be absolute holiness and purity.

What was lost is restored. There will never be a time that the tree of life fails, just as the water which flows from the throne will never fail. As healing is realized in Jesus, there will be no need for a process of healing, but rather there will be continued and uninterrupted health – for all eternity.

All of this and more will be available to believers in Jesus Christ. Now, even at this time, those who have called on Jesus are spiritually seated in Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7) and have complete and eternal access to the Water of Life and the Tree of Life.

This positional state will be fully realized at some glorious day in the future, and it can only come about by placing one's faith and trust in Christ Jesus alone. There is no other way to be reconciled to God. If you have never trusted Jesus for your healing and restoration, make the call today. Great things await the redeemed of the Lord! Indeed, today is the day of salvation. Call out to God for healing. Call out to Him through JESUS!

Lord God, how astonishingly wonderful it will be to live in Your presence, to see Your light, and to receive the unceasing stream of healing waters which flow from You. Great and glorious are Your promises, and we have faith that every one of them will come to pass exactly as Your word states. And Oh! How we wait for that wonderful day! Hallelujah and Amen.

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. Revelation 22:3

The words of John just noted the tree of life which will bear its fruit and of which the leaves are for "the healing of the nations." What was lost in Eden, the tree of life, is restored in New Jerusalem. But more, John next says, "And there shall be no more curse."

The Greek word is a noun found only here in the Bible, *katanathema*. It signifies "an oath-curse which 'devotes something to destruction'" (HELPS Word Studies). Thus, by implication, it is an accursed thing. The curse was introduced into the biblical narrative in Genesis 3:14 with the cursing of the serpent. As the serpent (the devil who is Satan) has already been chucked into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10), he is taken care of. But the earth was then cursed in Genesis 3:17 –

> Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it':
> "Cursed *is* the ground for your sake;
> In toil you shall eat *of* it
> All the days of your life.
> **18** Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
> And you shall eat the herb of the field.
> **19** In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
> Till you return to the ground,
> For out of it you were taken;
> For dust you *are,*
> And to dust you shall return." Genesis 3:17-19

The humanity of Christ Jesus lived out life under this cursed ground, but He did so without sin and without ever sinning. He died on Calvary's cross and was interred for the sins committed by His own creatures. Death came in as a result of sin, and sin was dealt with by His obedient death.

The sentence of man for his rebellion was carried out in the Person of Jesus Christ. The Lord God didn't cause the man to receive anything that He Himself wasn't willing to endure. Thus, He is both Just and the Justifier of everyone who calls on Him.

However, because He prevailed over the devil, He was resurrected by the power of God. The curse has been removed through Him, and now anyone who calls on Him will likewise be freed from the finality of death. The full realization of this is found here in Revelation 22.

From Genesis 3 until Revelation 22, the idea of that which is accursed has literally permeated Scripture. But now, as the Bible is ready to close out, the promise of there being no more curse is brought forth. Never again will such a thing come to mind. And the reason for this is that "the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it."

In the place where Christ reigns with all power, authority, and abundance of grace, there shall be no room for a curse. The people will receive the goodness of His presence in a state of eternal joy. The memory – meaning the contrast – of what was in their earthly life, and what now is in the heavenly existence, will be an eternal reminder of what it means to dwell without the stain of sin. And without sin, there will be no negative effects of sin, such as corruption or death.

In this wonderfully blessed state, John next says, "and His servants shall serve Him." Of the word "serve," Vincent's Word Studies says –

"The word originally means to serve for hire. In the New Testament, of the worship or service of God in the use of the rites intended for His worship. It came to be used by the Jews in a very special sense, to denote the service rendered to Jehovah by the Israelites as His peculiar people. See Romans 9:4; Acts 26:7; Hebrews 9:1, Hebrews 9:6. Hence the significant application of the term to Christian service by Paul in Philippians 3:3."

This then answers the age-old question, "What will we do in heaven?" Was man created to work the soil of the Garden of Eden? Not at all. Worshiping and serving God through Christ as noted now signifies the restoration of what was lost in Genesis 2 where man had intimate fellowship with God. First, in Genesis 2:7, it said –

> "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

Next, it said –

> "The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. **9** And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." Genesis 2:8, 9

After creating man – only after creating him – does it say that the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden. Eden means "delight" or "pleasure" and was, if man obeyed, a place not for work, but for a different purpose.

This is important to consider because in Genesis 2:5 it noted that there wasn't yet a man to "till the ground." This garden is something special and something intended for the man He formed. The ground which needed to be tilled was outside of the Garden, not in it.

If you stand back and look at the larger picture of the Bible, it's clear that God knew before the fall that man would fall. And so, the garden, despite being made as a place where God would fellowship with man, didn't fill the entire earth. Instead, the Garden was a localized place of grace, of abundance, and of provision from God above, not from the ground below.

God knew that man would fall and would be removed from the garden. But his time in the garden was not one of work, despite how most translations render it. In Genesis 2:15, it says –

> "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it."

This suggests that work is being proposed for the Garden of Eden. However, in looking at the purpose of the garden, this makes no sense. As noted, the man was to till the ground. However, that was outside of the garden. Man was formed outside Eden and then placed there.

John Sailhamer states that "The man was 'put' into the Garden where he could 'rest' and be 'safe,' and the man was 'put' into the Garden 'in God's presence' where he could have fellowship with God."

The word for "put" in verse 15 is the word *yanach*, a completely different word than what was used in verse 8. Dr. Richard Howe notes concerning this word, *yanach* –

"… the sense of the verb is causative, meaning that God 'caused Adam to rest' in the garden." If God "caused Adam to rest" in the garden, then why would man need to tend

and keep it? Dr. Howe notes, “The problem with these translations is that the pronoun in the verse does not agree in gender with the word ‘garden.’”

The word ‘garden’ is masculine in Hebrew, and so ‘garden’ can’t be the object of the verbs. Because of this, either this verse is an exception to the rule of the Hebrew language, or the verbs aren’t referring to the garden at all and instead something else is meant.

Doctor Howe’s conclusion is that the verbs should be taken as abstract in meaning and that “The significance of ‘resting the man in the garden’ is not to demonstrate man’s relationship to the garden, but rather to provide a setting for the story to demonstrate man’s relationship and responsibility to God.”

Therefore, his translation has an abstract meaning. Instead of “tend and to keep,” he says they should be translated “worship and serve,” as both words are translated elsewhere in the Bible. It wasn’t the garden to which Adam was responsible, but to God – to worship and to serve Him. Dr. Howe notes that, “Before the fall, Adam’s attention was directed upwards toward God.” He was to serve God through keeping His commandment, and he was to worship Him through trust and obedience.

But “After the fall, Adam's attention was directed downwards toward the ground.” Instead of looking to God for sustenance, he had to look to the ground. Instead of looking to God for eternal life, he would look to the ground as his final resting place. Understanding what occurred in the Garden of Eden and what is now promised in Revelation 22:3, it is seen that restoration of what was originally intended is promised to be seen once again. Man will serve God as was originally intended at the very beginning.

<u>Life application:</u> The lesson for us is that we have a choice. We can look upward to God, to worship and serve Him as He determines, or we can look to the ground and attempt to have our own works justify us. In the end, the ground is a hard master, one of bondage and pain, but the Lord is gracious and tender. As He promised to Israel –

> “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

The garden was lost to man, but through Jesus, it can be restored. In the Garden, there was no curse, just the chance to worship and serve the Creator. Jesus promises the same to us here on the final page of the Bible.

To worship and to serve the Lord our God
Eternal fellowship in a land of Delight
On hallowed soil our feet will trod
And the Lord shall always be in our sight

In His light, to walk and also to praise
The Lamb of God who was slain
Illuminated by His ever-glowing rays
No tears, no fear, no sorrow, no pain

Come to the waters and be restored
Drink and receive grace from the Lord

Heaven's door is open for all to go through
But you see it's guarded with cherub and sword
So, to pass through the gate, this you must do
It is the gospel, "Call on the Lord"

By faith in His work and by faith alone
Access is granted past Heaven's sword
His blood was shed for your sins to atone
Again, I beg you, call on the Lord

Again, I implore you, call on the Lord

Yes, make it today. Call out to God through His offer of peace. Call out to God through JESUS!

Lord God, as astonishing as it seems, You have done it! You have taken what we ruined by our disobedience, and through the work of Christ Jesus, You have returned all things to the way they were originally intended. You are great and You are worthy of all our praise, worship, and allegiance. Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty – Hallelujah and Amen!

They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. Revelation 22:4

John's words just noted that there would be no more curse, that the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in the city, and that the people of God (His servants) will serve Him. He now says, "They shall see His face." Of these words, the previous verse provides the explanation.

In 1 Timothy 6:16, while speaking of the brightness of the glory of God in Christ, it says –

> "who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom *be* honor and everlasting power. Amen."

It is Christ, the Lamb, who makes it possible to behold God. He is, as noted in Chapter 21, the lamp through which God's light is seen. This is understood from verses in both the Old and New Testaments. Job had an inkling of what it would be like –

> "For I know *that* my Redeemer lives,
> And He shall stand at last on the earth;
> **26** And after my skin is destroyed, this *I know,*
> That in my flesh I shall see God,
> **27** Whom I shall see for myself,
> And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
> *How* my heart yearns within me!" Job 19:25-27

John speaks of this coming time in his first epistle –

> "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." 1 John 3:2

David understood this as well –

> "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness;
> I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness." Psalm 17:15

These are but a few of the verses that anticipate this verse in Revelation. We shall be like Jesus in our glorified state, and we shall see the glory of God as it is revealed in Him. An entirely different order of existence shall be realized at that time. With that said, John next says, "and His name shall be on their foreheads."

Some translations incorrectly state "in the foreheads." The Greek means "upon" or "on." It could be that this is referring to something symbolic, as if the name is written

upon the forehead. However, because the previous verse said that "His servants shall serve Him," it is probably referring to their priestly status before God.

In Exodus 28, a plate of gold was affixed to the turban of the high priest that stated *qodesh l'Yehovah*, or "HOLINESS TO THE LORD." He was the one who directly served the Lord and the plate signified him as being set apart to the Lord. This same expression is then noted for all of the implements in Jerusalem in Zechariah 14 –

> "In that day 'HOLINESS TO THE LORD' shall be *engraved* on the bells of the horses. The pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. **21** Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the LORD of hosts. Everyone who sacrifices shall come and take them and cook in them. In that day there shall no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts."

This is a statement that all such implements will be dedicated to the service of the Lord at that time. In New Jerusalem, this will be the case with all who serve before the Lord. It is a note of complete sanctification and separation to the Lord. His people will be holy, and this is signified by the thought that "His name shall be on their foreheads."

The words of this verse speak of complete familiarity (seeing His face) and of complete identification with Him (His name on their foreheads). What lies ahead for the redeemed of the Lord will be unlike anything we can yet fully grasp. It will be a marvelous and blessed state.

<u>Life application:</u> When I was young, there were refrigerator magnets all over the front of the fridge in our home. One of them became the first Bible verse I ever learned –

> "Blessed *are* the pure in heart,
> For they shall see God." Matthew 5:8

What does it mean that these will "see God"? God doesn't have parts and cannot be seen as noted in Paul's words of 1 Timothy 6:16 (above). 1 John 4:12 confirms this, "No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."

People who speak about seeing God and then describing some type of form have made a category mistake. God has no form at all. However, speaking of Jesus, we read this in Hebrews 1:3 – "who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person." The visible manifestation of God and the One who reveals Him to His creation

is Jesus. Again, we go to Jesus' words in John 14:9 to understand this, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Now, in our sin-filled state, we cannot see the radiance of Jesus Christ in His fullness. Mortal man would be utterly consumed by the glorious display. Moses discovered this in Exodus 33:20, "But He said, 'You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.'"

However, when we are glorified, this will no longer be the case. When we are like Him, He shall be revealed to us in His fullness. Isaiah understood this and proclaimed it to Israel –

> "Your eyes will see the King in His beauty;
> They will see the land that is very far off." Isaiah 33:17

It is Jesus Christ who will endlessly reveal the glory of God to us as, through Him, we perceive this glorious Creator. Based on Scripture, the Trinity must be true because without the Son to reveal the Father to us, we would never be able to see this glory of God. Jesus is the link between the infinite and the finite. He is the point where God's glory is revealed.

And there is only one way to participate in this eternal revelation of who God is. That is to be like Him. We must share in the same nature and the same goodness that He has. We must be "pure in heart." But we are defiled – both through Adam and also because of our own sins. So how do we attain freedom from defilement? It is through the work of Christ Jesus.

He lived the perfect life we couldn't live, and then He gave His life as a sacrifice of atonement, a substitute suitable to an eternally perfect Creator. Now through faith in His work, we can be elevated from a fallen, earthly state to His perfect and heavenly state. As He said and as we can now more fully realize –

> "Blessed *are* the pure in heart,
> For they shall see God."

Because of this purity resulting in blessedness, the name of God and of the Lamb shall be on our foreheads as we serve Him. We will be identified as belonging to Him, and the stamp of approval shall be evidently displayed.

Marks have been used to identify people elsewhere in the Bible. The forehead is the spot where this mark is almost always explicitly noted. The reason is surely that it has resulted from a mental assertion concerning a particular issue. In the case of our mark, it is the result of the mental assertion that "Jesus is Lord" as is noted in Romans 10:9. When this assertion is accepted as truth in our lives, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God, In this, we move from death to life, from condemnation to salvation, from darkness to light, and from the devil to Jesus.

And all of it comes by the grace of God alone. Thank the Lord, even now, for the glorious work of Jesus Christ that made all of this possible! Yes! Thank God for our Lord JESUS!

Oh, God! It is the most glorious thing to know that we shall behold Your glory in its fullness and search out Your wisdom, beauty, and perfection for all eternity. We know that nothing here on earth will ever compare to seeing You and living in Your glorious light as it shines through the lamp – our Lord and Savior Jesus! Hallelujah and Amen.

There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:5

John has shown that those in New Jerusalem shall "see His face" meaning the Lamb, and that "His name *shall be* on their foreheads." He next says, "There shall be no night there." This was already stated in verse 21:25. As noted then, this doesn't mean that there is no night at all. If the city is descended from heaven to sit upon the earth, and if there are points on the compass by which the city is situated (see verse 21:14), along with other reasons given then, it tells us that there will be a sun, just not in the city itself. Inside the city, which is a cubed edifice, there will never be day and night. It is the place of the eternal Day of God's rest where the light of God will be illuminated by the Lamb, who is the lamp, for all eternity. That is stated in John's next words, saying, "They need no lamp nor light of the sun."

This is substantially repeated from verse 21:23, where it says, "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it." There will be such a brilliancy within the city that all will be evident even without a lamp (implying night, or at least shadow and darkness) nor the sun (implying day). Neither will there be the need of the sun (implying day).

The word translated as "lamp" is the Greek word *luchnos*. It refers to a type of oil burning lamp. It is symbolic of any artificially produced light. At John's time, there were no wax candles or electric lights of any kind. As such, he uses terminology that was understood in his day. There will be no need for such artificial lighting. Nor will there be a need for natural lighting, such as the sun or moon. It will be a place of constant light

that permeates all of the city. John explains this, saying, “for the Lord God gives them light.”

This is then also a close repeat of verse 21:23 which said, “for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light.” The glory of God is all that is needed to illuminate the entire city. There will be no points of darkness in this giant edifice. And it will be through Christ that this glorious light will be diffused. The splendor of Jesus Christ is what is on display as God will forever reveal Himself through Him. Everything about what is conveyed speaks of the divinity of the Lord Jesus.

With that stated, John next says, “And they shall reign forever and ever.” This is unlike the promise to the tribulation martyrs of Revelation 5:10. There it said –

> “And have made us kings and priests to our God;
> And we shall reign on the earth.”

That was then fulfilled in Revelation 20:6 –

> “Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

What is now described for those in New Jerusalem is that of an eternal position before God. Man will serve Him, and yet he will reign with Him forever and ever. This then is the fulfillment of the promise by Christ to the seven churches in Revelation 1 –

> “To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, **6** and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Revelation 1:5, 6

God has granted man the right to rule with Him while also serving Him as priests. The words are a splendid note of the grace of God bestowed upon His creatures. With these words, the heavenly vision of Revelation is complete.

<u>Life application:</u> What is described by John is a completely different order and category of existence than we see in the universe today. Our universe is directed by certain laws which govern it, such as the Law of Gravity. One of the laws which it is bound to is the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

This law states that in a closed system, the amount of energy is decreasing. This is known as entropy. This is a fixed law and has no exceptions. As the universe is a closed system, if it existed eternally then we would've run out of energy an infinite amount of time ago. It also means that because there was a beginning, without a new order of things, at some point in the future all the energy would eventually be used up. This means that everything would eventually become absolutely dark, absolutely cold, and without any motion at all.

However, because God is the Creator of the Universe, He is before the creation and thus He is outside of time, space, and matter. He is eternal, His power is without limit, and His glory is infinite in nature. He is the Light that will eternally illuminate the New Jerusalem and which will eternally sustain those in it. There shall be no end to it because He will eternally reside there, streaming forth His glory to the redeemed of the Lord.

In this state, we shall partake of every benefit, joy, and honor of the most exalted of people who have ever lived, and then some. The reason for this is not because we have somehow merited this favor, but because of the work of the King of kings, Jesus. We shall share in His glory forever.

For those who have called on Jesus, we are considered as seated in this heavenly position already, as is noted in Ephesians 2:4-7. However, at some wonderful point in the future, this will be actualized when we are glorified and are like Him in both nature and being.

The honors bestowed upon us are not to be taken lightly. What God has prepared for those who love Him came at the highest cost of all, the death of our Lord. We need to come before God with all praise, laud, and honor for the incredible work He accomplished through Jesus on our behalf. This is a great God, a beautiful Savior, and a glorious plan He has worked out for us. Thank you, O God, for JESUS.

Lord God, it is beyond our comprehension to even imagine what lies ahead for us. You, O God, are glorious beyond compare. You are worthy of all our devotion, honor, praise, and contemplation. Forgive us for failing to pursue You as we should. May we endeavor to continually give You all of who we are as we await the glory which lies ahead. Amen.

Then he said to me, "These words *are* faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. Revelation 22:6

With the vision of New Jerusalem complete, John returns to the words of the angel who has accompanied him, saying, "Then he said to me, 'These words *are* faithful and true.'" This is certainly referring to the entire received message that comprises the book of Revelation.

This seems apparent because it then follows the same pattern of the opening of Revelation where John was told to write, and what was written was directed to the churches as encouragement, admonition, and warning.

Likewise, John's words from verse 22:6 until the end of the chapter comprise two separate parts. The first comprises verses 6-17, and which gives encouragement, admonition, and warning to the church – and by extension to any who will hear the words of Revelation. The second comprises verses 18-21, and they refer to the words of the book itself.

Concerning the words of the angel now speaking, he confirms what was stated in Revelation 3:14 which says, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness." What God has revealed through Christ are the very words of God. They are faithful and true, and they will come to pass. John next says, "And the Lord God of the holy prophets."

Here, some manuscripts contain a second article, and they substitute the word "holy" with "spirits" – "The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets." Either way, this then means that the Lord (YHVH) of the Old Testament who inspired the prophets to put forth their words is the same Lord (Jesus) who has "sent His angel to show His servants" those things of the New Testament, including the faithful and true words of the book of Revelation.

This then is fully in accord with the words of Paul and Peter –

> "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16, 17
>
> "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; **20** knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, **21** for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:19-21

Of the things the Lord God has sent His angel to show to His servants, this verse now says that these are "the things which must shortly take place." Rather than an adverb (shortly), a noun is given, "the things that must come to pass in quickness." It is the same noun as in Luke 18:8 where there is an obvious long delay in what is spoken of. Thus, the context of the word there is not referring to something coming soon, but coming suddenly when it comes –

> "Then the Lord said, 'Hear what the unjust judge said. **7** And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? **8** I tell you that He will avenge them **speedily [lit: in quickness]**. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?'"
>
> -Luke 18:6-8

As such, there is no reason to assume that the exact same words, ἐν τάχει, or "in quickness," of Revelation 1:1 and Revelation 22:6 are necessarily referring to something happening shortly after they are received by John. Rather when they occur, they will occur in quickness. Hence, the words here are not necessarily suspect. Rather, they are reliable prophetic words that will be fulfilled in their own time.

Life application: There are several verses in Revelation that lead some scholars to adamantly claim that its contents were fulfilled already, back in AD70, with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the people of Israel. This is one of those verses and it speaks of "the things which must shortly take place." However, this confused thinking rejects hundreds of prophecies from the Old Testament which had not taken place by that time. These were given to – and are promises for – the nation of Israel, not to the church.

In order to justify why those prophecies never came to pass, they were "spiritualized" by scholars and then applied to the church instead of Israel. This is a doctrine known as "replacement theology." Just because the book of Revelation is coming to a close with the words "the things which must shortly take place," it in no way means that it excludes a fulfillment in our future – two thousand years later.

There are several possibilities, both of which answer this claim. The first is that "the things which must shortly take place" began to occur after John received and penned the book. Assuming the word is rightly translated as "shortly" rather than "in quickness," the church age was clearly described in chapters 2 & 3 and that age was already in its infancy at John's time. Just because the things began to take place shortly after Revelation was penned doesn't mean that they all had to occur shortly; no specific

time for their completion was given. Only when the church age – which is of indeterminate time – ends, then the events of the tribulation period will begin.

Secondly, the words of Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 show that God isn't working on our timetable. Those verses tell us that a day to the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. However long it takes to fulfill Revelation is a drop in the bucket compared to the things of eternity – which are already in the process of being described by John.

Therefore, it is a category mistake to assign Revelation's words to a time which was close to John's day from a human perspective. It is true that the Bible is given by God for man, and it is to be received from our perspective, but the words "How long" fill Scripture, thus indicating that what man thinks should happen quickly from his perspective is not always so.

Also, most scholars reasonably believe Revelation was written after AD70 and therefore that argument holds no water anyway. Words that are "faithful and true" will be accomplished exactly as God states, and there will be no doubt when they are fulfilled. Many of the OT passages concerning Israel and those in Revelation cannot be ascribed to any fulfillment at any time in history and therefore "faithful and true" cannot be assigned to their fulfillment yet.

Lastly, the God of the Old Testament prophets, who spoke about the future of Israel in the millennial kingdom, is also God of the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. The words of these people are joined together so that we can now see the entire panorama of biblical prophecy. Now we, as well as Israel, have a fuller knowledge of what is coming and how it will occur.

Have faith that God has a good plan for His people and that He has the future under His control. The Bible is fully reliable, and God is fully capable. Stand fast on that and hold fast to His promises without wavering. Be encouraged in the Lord always. Yes, be strengthened in JESUS.

Thank you, Lord! How wonderful it is to see past prophecies which have come true. These give us the assurance that all the other prophecies of Your wonderful, faithful, and true word will also come to pass – exactly as You have stated. Great are You, O God, and great is Your name. Hallelujah and Amen.

"Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." Revelation 22:7

The angel was speaking to John in the previous verse. Now, without any announcement, the words of Jesus are brought forth, saying, "Behold, I am coming quickly!" It goes unstated whether Jesus actually has spoken these words for John to hear, or if the angel speaks them to John with the understanding that they are the words of the Lord.

Either way, the adverb form of the noun just used in the previous verse is now used here. There, it spoke of the things that must 'in quickness' take place. These words of Jesus now exclaim that He will come quickly. It does not necessarily signify "soon," but rather when He comes, it will be suddenly. It is a note for those who hear to be prepared. With that, words are next substantially repeated from earlier in Revelation, saying, "Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

This is the sixth time that such a blessing is stated in Revelation. In Revelation 1:3, Jesus said, "Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near." As such, with the coming of the ending of the book, the admonition is stated once again.

The Greek verb is a present participle. It more correctly reads, "Blessed is he who 'is keeping' the words of the prophecy of this book." Because of this, it calls for constant watch and observation. It is similar to what was already stated by Peter –

> "Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in *both of* which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), **2** that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, **3** knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, **4** and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation.'" 2 Peter 3:1-4

Scoffers fail to "keep." Rather, they go about life ignoring the fact that God has a plan, and that what He says will come to pass, even if it appears otherwise. What seems like a delay to us is not so to Him. Everything is set according to what He has predetermined. The words of this verse ask those in the church to be attentive, and in such an attentive state, they will be blessed.

Life application: This is the fourth time it is noted that Jesus will come quickly. When He first comes for His church, it will be in the twinkling of an eye, and she will be gone. At

the end of the tribulation period, Christ will again appear, and He will work His judgment swiftly and with finality. All people should remember to live their lives as if each moment is the last. Either Christ will come for us by the rapture or by His return, or He will come for us in death – which could be at any moment as well.

For believers, Paul notes this in Romans 13:11 –

> "And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed."

For those who are not yet committed to Christ, Paul writes this in 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation." We are to be committed to the Lord, and we are to then be about the Lord's business until He comes (see Acts 1:7). Anything else will only lead to sadness and regret.

The second point to be considered is the change that is expected in those who read or hear the words of Revelation. The words cited above from Revelation 1:3 implored those who read and hear to "keep those things which are written in it." In other words, the earlier words anticipated that those who were starting the adventure of reading this book would continue to do so and to allow the words to sink in and have a positive effect on them. The words of Revelation 22:7, however, are stated in acknowledgment that the book has been read, and now the one who has read it will keep on keeping what was read.

This is similar to what James states in his epistle –

> "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; **24** for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. **25** But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it,* and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." James 1:22-25

James equates a person who hears or reads the word, and who then disregards what it says, to someone who gets up in the morning, looks at the shabby face in the mirror – unshaven, stuff in his eyes, hair all messy, etc. – and who then walks away not caring about his appearance.

The Bible is like a mirror to us. You should know your appearance will offend others, but instead of shaving your whiskers, combing your hair, and washing your face, you go out

as you are, and no one wants to be near you. Then you wonder why you're such a lonely guy. When we read the Bible, we need to absorb it and apply it to our lives. Just as James implores us, so the Lord now does in Revelation.

A third point to consider is that this book is a book of prophecy. Some books in the Bible are noted for wisdom, some for instruction, some for historical value, and some for praise and worship. Other books are books of prophecy. It would make no sense for this particular book of prophecy to be fulfilled in the way preterists claim, stating that its contents were realized and completed in AD70. Rather, the entire context of the majority of prophecies point to a date that is future to the church even now.

Don't be misled into believing that the church is ushering in the kingdom and that Jesus will return when we have brought peace on earth. The world is increasing in wickedness and the church is heading toward more loss and persecution, not less. It is the Lord Jesus who will return to defeat the enemies of God and usher in the kingdom. Until then, the Spirit is seeking out a bride for Jesus. Stand fast as the end-time events approach and don't lose heart if we as the church continue to suffer. Jesus is coming quickly. Even so, come Lord JESUS!

Heavenly Father, give us right thinking and clarity as we await the return of Christ. Help us to be ready at all times to share the good news and to lead those around us away from wickedness and towards righteousness. Give us a heart for the lost because the time is short. Let us not be slack in our duties. Amen.

Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Revelation 22:8

John had just heard the words of Christ (whether audibly spoken by the Lord or repeated by the angel who had presented the revelations to him), and it so greatly affected him that he was overwhelmed. As such, he conveys to us what then occurred, saying, "Now I, John, saw and heard these things."

The Greek is more precise, using an article with a present participle – "Now I John am the *one* who is seeing these things and hearing." He is conveying that everything has been an ongoing display before his eyes that he personally beheld. It is similar to his words that testify to his life, witnessing the work of Christ –

> "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— **2** the life was manifested, and we have seen, and

> bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— **3** that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." 1 John 1:1-3

John is once again testifying to the truth of his personal experience in beholding what God had set before him to witness to. In this position of trust appointed to him, he next says, "And when I heard and saw." The verbs are now aorist. With the vision having been seen, and with the senses overwhelmed at what he has just heard, John says, "I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things."

Again, John returns to a present participle. It more rightly states, "I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who is showing me these things." He doesn't know if the vision is complete or not. He has seen and heard to the point where he was overwhelmed, but he is also still in the presence of the angel who is there showing him the visions of the future.

What occurs in this sentence is what has already happened once before –

> Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." **10** And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See *that you do* not *do that!* I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Revelation 19:9, 10

Did John make the same error twice? Or is this a new error to avoid confusion? In Revelation 19:10, it says, "And I fell at his feet to worship him." Now, it says, "I fell down to worship [God? Or the angel?] before the feet of the angel."

In other words, it very well may be that John is falling to worship the Lord who gave the words, but the angel wants no confusion at all to be introduced into the narrative. As such, he ensures there is none by redirecting John's worship "to God and before God," rather than "to God and before a messenger." Either way, John's actions are spoken against in order to ensure that God alone is given the glory.

<u>Life application:</u> John has, just since the beginning of this chapter, seen the river of water of life which proceeds from the throne of God; the tree of life bearing fruit for each month of the year; leaves of the tree indicating healing of the nations; that there will be no more curse; that the throne of God and the Lamb will be right in the midst of

the people and that the people will serve Him; that the people will see His face and they will have His name on their foreheads; there will be no night in the New Jerusalem and no need of a lamp or the sun because of the radiance of God; and that the people will reign forever and ever.

After seeing these astonishing things which had been lost since the very beginning of man's history, as is recorded in the redemptive narrative, John was told that what had been described was "faithful and true;" that it was sent from the Lord God; and that these things must shortly take place. Finally, he was told that those who "keep the words of the prophecy of this book" would be blessed.

All of these things must have completely overwhelmed the beloved apostle of the Lord and in stunned awe of the beauty of what his eyes had beheld, he fell down to worship.

What will our response be when we gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and the wonders that He has prepared for us? Let us remember now that from Him alone stems all good things and that He therefore alone is worthy of our prayers, petitions, and praise. We must never make the mistake of offering any of these things to anything in creation.

We are not to pray to a person such as Mary or the saints, we are not to petition anyone, such as an angel, and we are not to offer praise to anyone or anything – such as the constellations. Instead, these are to be reserved for the Lord alone. It is easy to get sidetracked, but the Bible asks us to fix our thoughts, hearts, affections, and gaze upon the Lord. To Him alone be all glory, wisdom, power, and might. And so, to Him alone belongs our worship, attention, and devotion. Yes, let us magnify the Lord our God. Let us magnify JESUS.

Heavenly Father, thank You for showing us what to do directly in Your word. We don't need to guess if we should pray to a dead person or if we should praise a sunrise. We don't need to wonder about asking for a blessing from a wishing well. Instead, we know to offer these to You alone and in the name of Your beloved Son, Jesus. Amen.

Then he said to me, "See *that you do* not *do that.* For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." Revelation 22:9

With John's falling down before the feet of this messenger in order to worship (whether God, or – erringly – the angel), there is a response. John says, "Then he said to me..."

A note of correction is necessary for John's actions. There is to be no misunderstanding of what the idea of proper worship is. With this, the messenger says, "See *that you do* not *do that.*"

As in verse 19:10, the Greek is much more abrupt –Ὅρα μή (Hora mē, or "See not!"). The suddenness of the words is intended to arrest the attention of John and have him think clearly concerning his actions. With this, the angel next states, "For I am your fellow servant."

The words of this angel (the Greek simply meaning "messenger") lean to the idea that he is quite possibly human. It may be that he is a spiritual being, but either way, he clearly identifies himself as being on the same level as John in regard to his servanthood before the Lord. To further express this, he says, "and of your brethren the prophets."

A spiritual connection between John (an apostle) and the prophets is conveyed here. Each office has a particular purpose, which is to convey the word of God. And like the prophets, apostles were no more entitled to receive worship than they were. The angel is conveying a prophetic message to John, John is receiving it and will convey it to the church, but the Source of the revelation is God. Each is simply a messenger in his own right, and thus a servant of the Source of the message. From there, the angel then says, "and of those who keep the words of this book."

There are different responsibilities in the government of God, but all are subordinates to Him. Some bring the message from God, some receive it and proclaim it to the people verbally or in a recorded fashion, and some are to hear the word and then keep (meaning observe) that which is proclaimed to them. The angel notes that all subordinate levels are actually fellow servants. Servants are not masters. As such, there is One, and only One, who is to receive the honor of worship. And so, he clearly proclaims to John, "Worship God."

The angel exactingly repeats his words from Revelation 19:10 again. Only God is to be worshiped. Therefore, one must have an understanding of who God is. This is one of the main purposes of Scripture, the revealing of God in a manner so that man can understand Him in an intimate way. The God revealed in the Bible – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is the God who is to be worshiped. He and no other.

<u>Life application:</u> Whatever was on John's mind when he fell at the angel's feet to worship, it sent the wrong signal. Somebody may fall at the feet of the pope while worshiping God, thus indicating that he believes the pope is a valid intermediary. This would be an error. One does not need such an intermediary. Jesus Christ is the one and

only Mediator between God and man. Thus, the expression of falling before a pope actually deprives Jesus of His rightful due.

John may have fallen to worship God, but by doing so at the feet of the angel, he has made the same mistake. He may have thought, "I am worshiping God, and my worship will be transmitted through this angel to Him." It is inappropriate.

The prophets and apostles are noted as having especially high stations among men because they conveyed the words of God to the people of God. However, no person holding such an office, or any other high office granted by God, is worthy of worship, or even of being an intermediary in worship. This is noted in Acts 10:25, 26 – "As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him.* **26** But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man.'"

Along with the apostles and prophets who relayed God's word to humanity are those who keep the words of God through obedience to them. All of God's saints who hear the word, receive it, and keep it are considered co-heirs with Christ and are even now seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:4-7). However, this is only a conferred honor and was granted by God for His glory.

The angel speaking with John places himself in a category like the apostles, prophets, and saints. Psalm 8:5 says that man was made "a little lower than the angels." This implies that although angels have a higher station than man at this time, they are also created beings. Their job is not to receive glory, praise, and worship, but to ensure those are directed to God alone. And so, whether this angel is a man or a heavenly messenger, he is not to be worshiped.

Let us never set up an idol in our hearts through improper worship, and may we be proper examples to others of how to conduct ourselves before our God. God has given us the proper revelation in His word to teach us how this is to be accomplished. He has revealed Himself through the sending of His Messiah. Let us worship Him, then, through JESUS.

Help us, O God, to act rightly in our worship of You. Help us to never bow to another part of the creation and thus take from You what You alone rightfully deserve. You are glorious in all ways and surely You are worthy of all praise! Thank You for allowing us to come before You in worship and adoration. Amen.

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And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. Revelation 22:10

The previous verse contained the admonition for John to not worship at the feet of the angel. In his words, he said, "For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." Having said that, this verse now begins with, "And he said to me."

Due to the flow of the dialog, one might think this is still the angel, but it is not. This is now "God" speaking. The angel just said, "Worship God." He is the nearest antecedent –

- Worship God.
- And He [God] said to me.

This is surely the case because of what it says in verses 12 and 13, and then again in verse 16. Having said that, the idea being conveyed is that Jesus is God –

- Worship God. (22:9)
- And He [God] said to me. (22:10)
- "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work. **13** I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last." (22:12, 13)
- "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." (22:16)

With that understood, the words conveyed to John are, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book." This is the opposite of what was said in Revelation 10:4 –

> "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them."

There is no contradiction in this at all. If the words of the seven thunders are sealed up, it does not mean that what John is being told to not seal is somehow at odds with that. Rather, the note concerning the sealing up of the seven thunders is a part of the contents of the book which is not to be sealed. John is being told that what has been conveyed to him, including the fact that something that he heard was not to be

revealed. Rather, he is to make everything openly known that he has been told to reveal.

With this stated, the reason for this is given in the words, “for the time is at hand.” Here, the word *kairos* is used. Rather than speaking of the time as it passes by (the Greek word *chronos*), this word speaks of a particular moment or a suitable time. The time for the contents of the book to occur is ready to unfold.

As the book is written to the seven churches, this is not an indication that all of the events of the book are to be completed soon, but that the time for the words to begin to be fulfilled is.

For example, the church at Smyrna was told, “the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Such an event as is recorded there is “at hand.” So, why was John given this book of Revelation, detailing events even thousands of years later, and even off into eternity? The answer is to show this church, and all the other churches, that God has a plan and that it ends with the restoration of all things. The tribulation that these people will face, and of which some will even have to die from because of their faith, is not the end of the story. Instead, it is only a step on the way to the glory that has now been revealed to John.

The book is a book of hope, set forth for the people of God, and to give them confidence in the power of God in Christ to restore all things that were lost at the very beginning of man’s time on earth.

Life application: Something new entered into the events of the church age in 1948. That is the year Israel was reestablished in their land. What was hidden from the eyes of the church for so long is that there is still a plan and a purpose for them. We can see this clearly now, and it makes the immanency of Christ’s return even more palpable.

Scholars of prophecy and eschatology look with wonder at the events of the world today. With each new occurrence, the words of Old Testament prophecy, which seemed so confused that they had to be spiritualized to make any sense of them. In 1948, Israel returned as a nation. In 1967 Jerusalem was again taken by Israel. The land has and continues to be divided since then, such as Israel’s departure from Gaza.

Each of these events helps bring the way the Old Testament portrays many prophetic events into a focus never imagined before. Now seems to be the time in human history where the "words of the prophecy of this book" are really coming into complete clarity, meaning that the church age may be coming to a close soon. Wouldn't it be great to be the generation that sees the coming of the Lord for us! Even so, come Lord JESUS.

Lord, it is exhilarating to wake up and turn on the news and see prophecy being fulfilled before our eyes. What is written in the Bible, recorded so very long ago, is more up to date than the daily news. What an immensely wise and wonderful God You are! We look to You and Your glorious return with anticipation. Amen.

He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still."
Revelation 22:11

John was just instructed to not seal up the words of the prophecy of the book. And the reason was given, "for the time is at hand." Now, and with that understanding, this verse is given. The verbs are in the imperative mood. They speak of the future, as if in a prophecy. It is almost spoken forth in an ironic fashion.

Such words follow after the words of prophets, like Ezekiel and Zechariah, who cite the Lord in this manner, such as –

> "Thus says the Lord GOD. 'He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they *are* a rebellious house.'" Ezekiel 3:27

> "Then I said, 'I will not feed you. Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish. Let those that are left eat each other's flesh.'" Zechariah 11:9

Thus, the words refer to a state of certainty that will exist at the time the previous verse spoke of ("the time is at hand"). There is a point where the decided state of all people will be realized. Thus, what is stated does not mean that someone in one of the categories cannot change his state now. It simply refers to the fact that the state exists, and some will find themselves in it. Understanding this, the words begin with, "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still."

The verb used here signifies doing wickedly. As such, it should read, "He who is unrighteous, let him be unrighteous still." There is a time when those who are unrighteous will be set in that state forever. For example, when an unrighteous person calls on Christ for forgiveness of sins, he will turn from his unrighteousness. However,

another person who is unrighteous may die in that state. Such a person is who is referred to – "let him be unrighteous still." In other words, it means "he will be unrighteous henceforth." There is no possible change.

Next, it says, "he who is filthy, let him be filthy still." The word is *rhuparos*. It is an adjective found only in James 2:2 and then here. It is derived from the noun *rhupos* found only in 1 Peter 3:21. That speaks of grease-filth, dirtiness, and squalor which Peter equates to the state of moral filthiness. The adjective thus signifies moral filth. Of this, John Gill states, "all mankind are originally, naturally, and universally filthy, or defiled with sin. Some are cleansed from it by the blood of Christ, others are not; and these will continue polluted, nor will the fire of hell fetch out the filthiness of their hearts and nature."

The words next turn to the thought of "he who is righteous, let him be righteous still." This is the state of that which is judicially approved by God. That can only come through the cleansing power of His Christ. Thus, one who stands justified before God in this state will remain in that state forever. The filth of sin has been forgiven, the state of righteousness has been imputed, and the person is forever purified to come before God.

Finally, the words state, "he who is holy, let him be holy still." The first three categories were in the active voice – "be [unrighteous]," "be filthy," and "be righteous." This one is now in the passive voice, and thus it should rightly be rendered, "he who is holy, let him be made holy still."

Man does not make himself holy, but rather he is imputed the holiness of Christ. For the person who has come to God through Him, his sanctification is made complete. He is made holy. This thought is reflected in such verses as –

> "that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:16

> "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."
> -1 Corinthians 6:11

The states of man spoken of in this verse can be changed in a person's life, but only while he lives. Hebrews makes it clear in the words, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). May those who read consider

their state now, while they have a chance to do so. And then, may they respond according to the call of God in Christ.

Life application: Three types of people are mentioned in this verse. Two fall into a negative state, and they are headed toward destruction. The third has taken the right path. As noted, the imperative mood is put for the future; it is not a command but a warning. So, to paraphrase, look at the words in this light – "Let the wrongdoer be made unjust; let the filthy person be made vile; and let the righteous person be made holy."

Those who are wrongdoers and who fail to see the error of their way will end in the judgment of the unjust. As such, their state will continue for eternity. There will be no change to their character forever and ever.

The first category, those who are unrighteous or unjust, is well explained by Paul's words in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans –

> "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, **19** because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. **20** For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, **21** because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Professing to be wise, they became fools, **23** and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." Romans 1:18-23

Those who fail to come to Christ, will never be cleansed from their state but will continue on in their corruption for all eternity.

The second category speaks of those who are vile or filthy. Paul's letter continues on describing their vulgarity –

> "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, **25** who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.
> **26** For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. **27** Likewise also the men,

leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due." Romans 1:24-27

The logical progression is from unrighteousness to vulgarity and filth. It goes from an unconcerned mental state accompanied by corresponding actions to a belligerent mental state accompanied by such actions. The book of Proverbs shows us a classic example of such a person who has so suppressed the knowledge of God and of righteousness that her life has become vile and even antagonistic towards morality –

"This *is* the way of an adulterous woman:
She eats and wipes her mouth,
And says, 'I have done no wickedness.'" Proverbs 30:20

The third category refers to those who are righteous; they will be made holy. However, these people are not righteous in and of themselves. They had to come to Christ from an unrighteous state. When they came to Christ, they did so by understanding their own unrighteousness and thus their need for a Savior. If they were unrighteous, then they needed Christ. When they came to Him, He bestowed His righteousness upon them.

Therefore, it was an imputed righteousness, not an inherent one. Those who have come to Him will be made holy. They are the ones suitable for entrance into the city which God has prepared for them. They are covered by Christ, and they will be glorified to be like Him. Let us thank God for His provision found in our Lord JESUS.

Oh God, we are thanking You today for Your righteousness which will lead to our glorification. We know that what we deserved was hell, but You have granted us heaven instead. Thank You for Jesus our Lord. Hallelujah and Amen.

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work. Revelation 22:12

With the admonition and warning of the previous verse stated, Jesus again says, "And behold, I am coming quickly." It is a repeat of the words of verse 22:7. As noted then, this does not necessarily signify "soon," but rather when He comes, it will be suddenly. It is a note for those who hear to be prepared. With that understood, He next says, "and My reward *is* with me."

This is noted as a prerogative of the Lord (YHVH) in the book of Isaiah when speaking of exactly this thought that is again being described now in Revelation, and yet it is Jesus who makes the statement –

> "Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong *hand,*
> And His arm shall rule for Him;
> Behold, His reward *is* with Him,
> And His work before Him." Isaiah 40:10

> "Indeed the LORD has proclaimed
> To the end of the world:
> "Say to the daughter of Zion,
> 'Surely your salvation is coming;
> Behold, His reward *is* with Him,
> And His work before Him." Isaiah 62:11

This then is an absolute confirmation that the Lord of the Old Testament is revealed in Jesus of the New. The two are One and the same. The reward is that which He alone possesses for those just described in the previous verse. Depending on which category they fall into, there will be life or death. There will be the granting of heaven or the casting of the soul into hell. There will be honor and glory, or there will be shame, corruption, and contempt.

With Christ and His reward with him, He next says, "to give to every one according to his work." The word "give" is insufficient. It signifies to give back or to return. Therefore, it should be translated as "render" or "repay." Further, this is a quote from Job –

> "For He repays man *according to* his work,
> And makes man to find a reward according to *his* way." Job 34:11

Again, these words, spoken by Elihu, refer to the Lord (YHVH). But Jesus claims them as a right He possesses. The reward of life is based on a "work," but that work is simply a work of faith –

> "Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.'" John 6:29

What God expects is that we believe in Christ. That is our work. Any "work" beyond that which is worthy of reward still must be a "work" of faith. Without faith in the Lord, in whatever we do, there can be no reward for it. But when a deed is done in faith, it is

pleasing to God. Everything that man does must be done with Christ Jesus in mind. And when it is done in this way, it is worthy of God's approval and His reward. It is Jesus who grants them to man on behalf of God.

Life application: Jesus has now stated for the fifth time that He is coming quickly. As seen, this is speaking not as much as a "when" but a "how." When Christ returns, it will be suddenly and without warning. From the inception of the church age, there has been no time when He could not have come, and therefore His return is always imminent. As such, the church and the believers in the church are to live in constant expectation of His coming.

And in His coming, He will be the Dispenser of rewards. In whatever way our lives have been conducted, that is how we will be recompensed. But everything returned to us will be based on what we have already done. That is the purpose of repaying. We shall be rewarded according to the measure of our faith, and how it is directed to God through Christ.

As noted above, our works must, by necessity, be works of faith in order to be rewarded. Ensure today that what you do is for the glory and honor of Jesus Christ. If it is, you will be rewarded by our great God who overlooks nothing. Let us be ready when we stand before JESUS.

Lord, though we fail You continually, You know our hearts and our love for You. Spur us on to great deeds of faith, and to works that will demonstrate this love. Thank You for every good blessing You have given us. Help us to pass those blessings on to others as well, noting that they came from You. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."
Revelation 22:13

As a note, various manuscripts transpose the second and third clauses –

> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (BSB)

These follow after Revelation 1:8 and Revelation 1:11 –

> "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Revelation 1:8

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," Revelation 1:11

As noted, when evaluating those verses, they are speaking of Jesus Christ. That is clearly confirmed here where all three clauses are found in one verse. A detailed description is given of them in those commentaries, and a briefer one will be found in the life application section below.

In short, however, by bringing all three of these titles into one verse, it is a way of clearly and unambiguously communicating to us that Jesus Christ is the full explanation of the unseen God (Alpha and Omega). As such, He is the Word of God. He is also Yehovah Elohim of the Old Testament Scriptures (the First and the Last) as is clearly stated in Isaiah 46 (and elsewhere). And He is also the Initiator and the Concluder of all things (the Beginning and the End). As such, nothing occurs apart from Him.

The reason for repeating this at the end of the book of Revelation is the same as stating them at the beginning of it. It is a note that Jesus Christ is in control of the entire redemptive narrative. Indeed, He is in control of everything from the moment of creation and as long as creation exists. He fashioned the word; He will bring the world to a state of perfection once again. He formed man; He will bring man to a good end in His presence. Everything will be as it should be, and for those who simply trust Him, there will be a good end. The eternal state will be one of blessing, abundance, and joy in His presence.

Revelation 22 corresponds to the 22nd letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet, *tav*. In Christ's proclamation, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," He is saying the same thing as, "I am the Aleph and the Tav." Omega and Tav are the final letters of the aleph-bet. In picture, *tav* is the sign, mark, signal. It is represented by crossed sticks and is revealed in the cross on which the Lamb died.

<u>Life application:</u> In verse 8, John erringly fell at the feet of the angel in worship. To understand why this probably occurred, a review was made of the verses which preceded it. In this verse, Jesus makes absolute claims about Himself. Likewise, to understand why He has done so, we should review what has transpired since verse 8.

But to understand the "why" we need to grasp the "what." What are these claims He is making? First, He is the "Alpha and the Omega." This is a repetition of His claim in Revelation 1:8, 1:11, and 21:6. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last. There must be a beginning to an alphabet in order for there to be an alphabet. Every alphabet has an end as well.

In other words, there is a logical sequence to how we grasp concepts. Without such, there is chaos. Jesus is the One who establishes the order of all things, and He is the One who completes the order as well. Within Him then is the perfection of all order, and there is in Him all knowledge that can be derived from all things, just as an alphabet is the basis for a language by which things are described, cataloged, analyzed, etc. Thus, Jesus is the Word, the explanation of all things – why they exist, how they exist, and what their purpose is.

His second claim is that He is the Beginning and the End. This is a repetition of His claim from Revelation 1:8 and 21:6, and it is a build upon the thought of Isaiah 46:9, 10 –

> "Remember the former things of old,
> For I *am* God, and *there is* no other;
> *I am* God, and *there is* none like Me,
> **10** Declaring the end from the beginning,
> And from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done,
> Saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
> And I will do all My pleasure."

If there is a temporal existence, then there must have been a beginning to that existence because an infinite regress is impossible. For one to state, for example, that the universe always existed is illogical. If there were no beginning, then there could be no present. An infinite regress of time is possible mathematically, but not actually.

The "line of books" argument explains this. Consider each book as an interval of time. If you have an infinite series of black books and between each black book there is a red book, you have one infinite series of books. If you take out all the red books and put them in a pile, you haven't decreased the number in the line by even one, and yet you have an infinitely large pile of red books which would fill all the space in the universe. Time really had a beginning, and you could not reach "now" if it didn't. But here we are, right now.

Because there must have been a beginning, there must have been a "Beginner." The universe could not create itself because it would have had to exist before it existed; a logical contradiction. Thus, there must be a Beginner who is outside of time; this is God – the eternal one. Paul reveals this to us in 2 Timothy 1:8, 9. This is something that was postulated by scholars and philosophers for eons, but it wasn't proven until Einstein penned the General Theory of Relativity in the early 20th century –

> "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, **9** who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." 2 Timothy 1:8, 9

Jesus claims to be the one who began all things, including time. He is also the End. He is the One who will bring everything to its consummation. He has made a promise to those who call on Him that they will live eternally. An eternal existence implies that each moment of eternity is new and unexplored. Therefore, each moment is an end in itself. He is that End because He is the fulfillment of every desire of the soul that longs for eternity. Therefore, as each new moment occurs, it is a new beginning. It is an endless stream of existence where we will explore the infinite glory of who He is.

His third claim is that He is the First and the Last. This concept is given three times by God in Isaiah, such as in Isaiah 44:6 –

> "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel,
> And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:
> 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last;
> Besides Me *there is* no God.'"

The claim is also stated in Revelation 1:11, 1:17, 2:8, and 2:19. In the Isaiah verse, God ties being the only God in with being the First and the Last. In other words, there is – and there can be – only one Creator. If there were more than one "God," then each god would lack something the other god possessed. They then could not be God at all because the very nature of God is that He lacks nothing and is perfectly complete within Himself.

It is God, the One true God, that is the First and He is also the Last. Because He created time, He is outside of time. When we look back to the creation, He is there as the First, and when we look forward to the eternal state, He is there as the Last. He is "All in all."

With this (albeit limited) understanding of Jesus' claim, we can see why the claim is made based on the preceding verses. The first reason is the fact that John made the mistake of offering worship to (or simply before) a created being. In order to show why this was wrong, Jesus proclaims His nature. In this understanding, there is no excuse to ever offer worship to anything but God. And this is what the angel proclaimed in verse 9 – "Worship God."

After this, John was told to not seal the words of the prophecy of the book. Why? It is because God has spoken, and they will come to pass. The people God has created must be ready. John was then given the explanation for this – "the time is at hand." After this, he was told that each person will remain in the state they were in for eternity, and therefore it is the wise one who will ensure that he is ready for that eternal state. And finally, leading us to today's verse is Jesus' statement that He is coming quickly, that His reward is with Him, and that rewards will be meted out according to one's work.

Because of all of these things, Jesus proclaims His nature and being. The logical progression of Revelation is astonishing and shows the wisdom of God and the care He has taken in proclaiming His beautiful word. We all stand at the threshold of eternity, and we all must be ready for the moment of Christ's coming – either through our death, through rapture, or through His second advent. God has offered; now we must accept. Be ready and call out today for JESUS!

Oh God, how beautifully glorious You are. May we never stop pursuing the knowledge of You and of Your glory. Praises, honor, and majesty belong to You! Amen.

Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. Revelation 22:14

Manuscripts vary in this verse. Both of them are in the present tense. Some say, "those doing His commandments," and some say, "those washing their robes." Doing, or keeping, the commandments is referred to in verses 12:17 and 14:12. The washing of robes is noted in verse 7:14.

Though the translations are greatly different in wording, they are similar in thought. Doing the commandments of Christ refers to doing those things that are necessary for salvation, meaning accepting the gospel. First and foremost, it is to trust Him alone for salvation.

Washing one's robes carries the same general meaning. One is stained with sin, but in receiving Christ, he is purified. The symbolism is that of standing in a right relationship with God, purified from all sin, and therefore justified because of what Christ has done. The idea is also conveyed in Revelation 3:5 –

> "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

Either way, the idea is that of receiving the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is in this that the words state, "Blessed are those who do [doing] His commandments [or: are washing their robes]." This is the seventh and final time that such a blessing is stated in Revelation. All seven, listed together now, say –

- "Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near." (Rev 1:3)

- "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes," says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" (Rev 14:13)

- "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." (Rev 16:15)

- "Then he said to me, 'Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God.'" (Rev 19:9)

- "Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." (Rev 20:6)

- "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." (Rev 21:7)

- Blessed *are* those who do His commandments [or: wash their robes], that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. (Rev 22:14)

Of these who do as is now stated, it says, "that they may have the right to the tree of life." John 3:16 simply states –

> "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

If this is true, and if it is the "tree of life" that allows man to live forever (as is seen in Genesis 3:22), then the tree of life is a picture of life in Christ. This is why the gospel is called a stumbling block. It is so simple that people trip right over it. As humans, we

attempt to rely on ourselves when things get dire. And the most dire state we can be in is that of death leading to hell. It is against our nature to say, "I will trust another to save me." But that is what the gospel is. It is a message that we are in sin, we cannot save ourselves, but Jesus can. We are to put aside our own works and simply believe. When we do this, we receive the right to the tree of life, "and may enter through the gates into the city."

Access to New Jerusalem signifies access to the presence of God. It is the state that Adam had before the fall. It is a place where man can intimately fellowship with Him, and where we will be able to worship and serve Him in the most intimate way. This is promised again to any who will simply do as the word instructs. And that is to have faith in what God accomplished in the giving of His Son for us.

Life application: Wonderful restoration! This is a major theme of the Bible. Man fell. Because of his disobedience, certain rights and privileges were lost. Jesus came to restore those to His people. However, there is more than just a one-for-one restoration. Man has the knowledge of good and evil which he lacked when he was created. Further, man has an understanding of the depth of God's love because of the biblical story.

Without the fall, we never would have understood the extent to which God was willing to go for His creatures. What a wonderful, glorious story we have in God's entrance into humanity through the Person of Jesus. Today we see the restoration of two concepts that were lost in the fall. The first is, as was noted in Revelation 22:2, the tree of life. The second, which was looked at in detail in Revelation 21, was access to New Jerusalem through the gates of the city.

Here is the Genesis 3 account referred to above –

> "Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— **23** therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. **24** So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." Genesis 3:22-24

Man gained the knowledge of good and evil, and lost access to Eden and to eternal life. Now, at the end of the Bible, man retains the knowledge he gained and receives the right to both eternal life and access to the city of God. It is "restoration plus." As you may note in Genesis, an angel was placed at the east of the Garden of Eden which guarded the way to the tree of life.

It is noted in Revelation 21:12 that in the New Jerusalem there will be angels at each of the 12 gates. This signifies that access is still guarded, but that it is possible to enter. How and to whom is this possible? It is to those who receive Jesus, thus accepting God's offer of peace and reconciliation. In the end, Jesus explains what is necessary to do what God expects and thus to have garments of white –

> "Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.'" John 6:29

When faith is placed in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God, a person moves from unrighteousness to righteousness; from being sin-stained to being sinless; from being at enmity with God to being adopted into God's family. It is by faith alone that this occurs. And thus, we see the marvel of God's plan for the people of the world. It is a plan of reconciliation and restoration accomplished solely by the grace of God. What a wonderful story of God's love. Thank God for JESUS!

O Lord God! How could You look upon us, Your fallen creatures, and see anything worth restoring? But You have, and what You did came at the highest price of all – the cross of Jesus. As David asked so long ago – "Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign Lord?" Apparently so, but it is beyond comprehension. Wondrous are Your ways, O God. Amen.

But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. Revelation 22:15

In the previous verse, it referred to those who "have the right to the tree of life." It further described them as those who "may enter through the gates into the city." Now, the contrast is given, saying, "But outside *are* dogs."

It should be noted that the first five categories are all preceded with the definite article in the Greek, and they should be translated that way to clearly define each category – "the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the sexually immoral, and the murderers, and the idolaters." Also, several of these categories have already been explained in Revelation 21:8. Rather than skipping over them, they will be re-explained here.

Concerning "the dogs," they are unclean animals according to Levitical law, but this is not what is being referred to. Dogs are also used in typology in Scripture when being equated to the wicked (Psalm 22:16), ignorance (Isaiah 56:10), destroyers (Jeremiah 15:3), and so on. Thus, they are given as a general category of that which is violent and without reasoning. But that is not what is being referred to here. Also, dogs are those

things that eat up the dead, such as when they took care of wicked Jezebel in 2 Kings 9. But this also isn't what is being referred to here. Rather, the symbolism goes back to Deuteronomy 23:18 –

> "There shall be no *ritual* harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. **18** You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the LORD your God for any vowed offering, for both of these *are* an abomination to the LORD your God."

These words are not speaking of an actual dog. Rather, it follows on with the thought of the previous clause which refers to the wages of a harlot. The word "price" is joined to that of a dog, meaning the male prostitute, the "perverted one" of verse 17. Moses was using parallelism –

- ritual harlot (*qedeshah*) / wages of a harlot
- perverted one (*qadesh*) / price of a dog

The idea is then the doglike manner in which the perverted one presents himself. Thus, this is its own category of perversion. The man who presents himself as a dog for religious prostitution will remain outside the city. The irony of this is that such a person who supposedly practices this act for a religious rite will never come inside the place that is the ideal for all religious hope. The means of attempting to obtain heaven excludes such a person from what he had striven to attain.

Next are mentioned "the sorcerers." HELPS Word Studies defines this as "properly, a sorcerer; used of people using *drugs* and 'religious incantations' to drug people into living by their *illusions* – like having magical (supernatural) powers to manipulate God into giving them more temporal possessions."

Next are mentioned "the sexually immoral." The word speaks of a male prostitute. However, in the New Testament, that is given as a type of any who engages in sexual immorality. Paul uses the term several times where it is translated as "fornicator," "whoremonger," and so on.

Next are "the murderers." This refers to those who commit unjustified, intentional homicide. After them, are mentioned "the idolaters." This speaks of a server or worshiper, either literally or figuratively, of idols. Being in a congregation where Christian images, such as crucifixes, statues of "saints," and so on are served must be included in this. Without Christ's atoning sacrifice to cover one's sins, such actions

merely heap up added guilt. They are no different than worshiping statues of Buddha. Such will be excluded from entry.

Finally, it says, “and whoever loves and practices a lie.” The verbs are present participles and should be rendered “and whoever is loving and practicing a lie.” It signifies those whose nature it is to do so. They have not come to Christ. As such, they are excluded from entry into New Jerusalem. The word “lie” is general in nature. It certainly includes liars, but it signifies false, deceitful, lying, and untruths, and even those practicing false religions.

Of those who fall into these various categories, it was said in verse 21:8 that they “shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.” Now, the contrast is given, they shall have no access through the gates into New Jerusalem. They shall remain outside of God’s favor and separated forever from His presence.

Life application: Although another set of warnings is given before the close of the book, this is the last direct mention of particular sins which will exclude entry into the New Jerusalem. This doesn’t mean that those who practice such things will be outside the city walls walking around on earth. Rather, it means that they will be taking an eternal swim in the Lake of Fire which burns with brimstone.

May we all continually evaluate ourselves and flee from the sins which separate us from our loving Creator. God has placed this final list of sins at the closing of His word to remind us of the severity of sin and the consequences which arise from practicing them.

Even if we have come to Christ, been cleansed by Him, and are no longer imputed sin (2 Corinthians 5:19), we need to remember that our actions will be judged at the Bema Seat of Christ. Let us strive to be pleasing to the God who has saved us from our sins by sending His beloved Son, our Lord JESUS.

Lord Jesus, throughout Your word we have been reminded many, many times of the importance of holy and right living. And even at the end of Your word, on its last page, You give stern warnings. Surely, You are just when You judge and especially when You have been so explicit in Your warnings. Help us to never diminish the severity of sin. Amen.

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.” Revelation 22:16

Those who are allowed into, and those who are excluded from, New Jerusalem have been noted. With that thought now complete, come words from the Lord directly. It could be that these words are being transmitted through His messenger, or it could be that Jesus directly speaks. Either way, the words begin with, "I, Jesus have sent my angel to testify to you these things."

That takes the reader right back to Revelation 1:1 –

> "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John."

The Lord has a message for His servants, and He has transmitted it through His angel to John. All three are a part of the transmission of the book. And this message, which is now the book of Revelation, is to be testified "in the churches."

The Greek word, translated as "in" is *epi*. It is a word that generally means "on," thus giving the idea of "that which fits." As such, it is as if the message is alighting upon the churches. It is these seven churches that then represent all churches to follow throughout the church age. Each being a type, or pattern, of the various churches in various states before the Lord. As such, it is something the churches can wrap themselves in and feel blessed in. It is a beacon of hope for those throughout the church age who have no other place of hope.

John received the Revelation two thousand years ago. The utter stupidity of claiming that the message of Revelation is only for those of the tribulation period is made evident by the fact that churches for these past two thousand years have come to the book and found that hope they can hold on to in the most terrible of times.

There has been an unending stream of war, famine, pestilence, persecution, and martyrdom in the world since Revelation was penned, but through it all, churches – and those in the churches – have been able to wrap themselves in the contents of this book in order to know that there is a hope that transcends their present moments of affliction.

The church is given their notes of correction, and their promises of the glory ahead, in the first three chapters. From there, they are provided the assurances that there will be an end to the evil in the world during the tribulation period. During and after that, it is given the assurance that God is faithful even to His unfaithful people. God is upholding His word and will fulfill His prophecies spoken to Israel. In this display of faithfulness, the

church is then given the absolute assurance that they too will receive the promises of glory set forth now by John.

Revelation has been, and it continues to be more so with each passing day, a book of hope in an often hopeless world. And yet, people tear it out of its proper context – for whatever perverse reason – and rob the church of the very hope the Lord has provided for them when the times of anguish, grief, or overwhelming sadness fill their souls.

To ensure that His words are to be accepted and clung to all the more, He next says, "I am the Root and the Offspring of David." A human does not beget his father. Thus, this is a statement of the nature of Christ, being the God/Man. This was prophesied by Isaiah to Israel, but – importantly – Isaiah's prophecy includes the Gentiles –

> "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
> And a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Isaiah 11:1
>
> "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
> Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
> For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
> And His resting place shall be glorious." Isaiah 11:10

Again, the ludicrous nature of hyperdispensationalism is revealed in these words from Isaiah, and which Jesus refers to. Jesus is the Root of David, being the Lord God who fashioned Adam, and through whom David came. He is also the Offspring of David, the Messiah who came to receive all of the covenant promises given to him concerning an eternal kingdom – a kingdom that calls out to the Gentiles as well as to Israel. The next verse will reveal this more specifically with the word "whoever." There are no limitations based on age, ethnicity, sex, tribe, or so on.

The thought is almost a mirror of what Paul states in the opening words of Romans –

> "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God **2** which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, **3** concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, **4** *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."
>
> -Romans 1:1-4

The message is to any who are simply willing to come, and it is a united message from all of the apostles in their letters. There is not one gospel to the Jew and one to the

Gentile. The heresy of hyperdispensationalism becomes painfully evident when the word is taken as a whole, understanding that it has a unified intent for all of the people of the world.

With the assurance that this is so, the verse ends with, "the Bright and Morning Star." It is a term similar to that of Revelation 2:28. The Greek of these two does show a difference though –

- *ton astera ton prōinon* – the star the morning (2:28)
- *ho aster ho lampros ho prōinos* – the star the bright the morning (22:16)

Christ is the Hope of mankind for an eternal future. Without Him, there will only be death, decay, and eternal darkness. But Christ is the One to come forth, leading the way to the everlasting Day that man has hoped for. In a world of darkness, He is our Beacon of hope. He offers that hope to us, to share in Himself, and to be a part of what He is doing to redeem fallen man. In placing our trust in Him, we will find the brightness of the eternal Day that He alone can usher us into.

Life application: We cannot skip over the book of Revelation without missing out on a part of the very word of the Lord who authored the entire canon of Scripture. We also must be extremely careful when handling this word. If we over-spiritualize its contents, we diminish the reality of what Jesus wants us to understand. However, there are also allegorical elements to the book which must be understood as such.

The only way to have the proper interpretive balance is to know the rest of the word which He has given to us through His prophets and apostles. Jesus is speaking to His church, just as He has all along. The church is to know and understand, based on the whole counsel of the Bible, that He has placed the church here in the Dispensation of Grace and that it will be removed to fulfill His plans for the nation of Israel.

After the tribulation period, the church will return with Him, and there will be a millennial reign of Christ on earth where the law will go forth from Zion. What the role will be for those who return with Christ during the millennium – if any – goes unstated. Eventually, there will be an eternal state with a literal city, the New Jerusalem, where God will dwell with man. All of these things have been spoken, and all of these things are to be understood from the book of Revelation. The church is to be the one to carry this message to the world until her job is complete.

God united with humanity in the womb of a virgin from the line of David, and thus He is the very point where the infinite meets with the finite. He is the Bridge back to God for

mankind, and He is the Mediator between the two. And because this verse centers on the name of David, He is the greater King which David only prefigured. He is the ruler of the nations and the Almighty God whose throne and dynasty are eternal. He is Jesus.

Finally, Jesus states He is the Bright and Morning Star. Peter uses this term for Him in 1 Peter 1:19. Malachi 4:2 calls Him the "Sun of righteousness." He is the one who revealed the Father's glory to the apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration. He is the One who in Revelation 1:16 has a countenance "like the sun shining in its strength." He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being. He is JESUS.

O great God Almighty – How wonderful it is to know You intimately because of our Lord and Savior Jesus. What was far off and uncertain becomes close and intimate through Him. What was once a point of fear because of our sin has now become a point of freedom because of His shed blood. O God, thank You for our wonderful Lord. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.
Revelation 22:17

With Jesus' proclamation that He is "the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star," several new voices are brought into the narrative. This is probably the words of the angel speaking for them, but it may be Jesus who speaks them out on their behalf. Or, it could even be John writing it out for the reader. No matter which way, the words now state, "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'"

The call of the Spirit probably encompasses more than just the thought of the Holy Spirit calling out to a person with a voice. Rather, this probably encompasses everything the Spirit has done to call out to humanity. In other words, the words of Scripture are given by inspiration of the Spirit to be heard by any who will receive them –

> "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, **21** for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:20, 21

The Spirit also indwells those in the church who then preach and teach the word. And so on. Therefore, when it says, "the Spirit," it is an all-encompassing thought of the work of the Spirit within creation to effectually woo a person to respond.

The call of the Bride is in harmony with that. Those who have the Spirit comprise the Bride. Any person who responds to the gospel is a part of the Bride. First is the response to the gospel and the sealing of the Spirit –

> "In Him you also *trusted,* after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 1:13, 14

With that, there is the preparation of those so sealed for their position as the Bride –

> "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, **26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, **27** that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."
> -Ephesians 5:25-27

In this union, they together make the call, "Come." It is the call to the unsaved to participate in what God is doing. Open the word! Read it and believe it! Hear the message and receive it! However, the word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ is brought to a person, the call is to Come!

With that understood, the next words say, "And let him who hears say, 'Come!'" This refers to those in the church who have heard and accepted the gospel –

> "Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near." Revelation 1:3

They have "heard" the voice of the Spirit and the Bride and have joined in union with them, now a part of them. Having joined, they now make the same call they responded to, "Come!" They have been saved by the Lamb and now want others to know and experience the life-giving truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Next, the words say, "And let him who thirsts come." It is a reference to Isaiah 55:1 –

> "Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
> Come to the waters;
> And you who have no money,
> Come, buy and eat.

Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.

The words are then fulfilled in the promise of Jesus to anyone who will believe in Him –

> "On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. **38** He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' **39** But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given,* because Jesus was not yet glorified." John 7:37-39

This is a callout to all people of the world. It is the one (and only) gospel message. There is a fount of living water, the Holy Spirit, that will provide everlasting life to any who will simply respond to the call. And so, the call is made, "Let him who thirsts come and be a part of what God is doing in the world."

The plan of the redemption of man has been in place since the fall of man. That plan is centered solely on the giving of His Son for the sins of the world. Everything else that has been done has been to either anticipate that, or to explain that. Therefore, the final words of the verse are given, "Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."

In John 4, Jesus made this offer to the Samaritans, but His words extend out even beyond them to any, without limitation saying, "whoever" –

> Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."
> **11** The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? **12** Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"
> **13** Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." John 4:10-14

The Spirit was given to Israel in Acts 2. It was given to these Samaritans in Acts 8, and the same Spirit was given to the Gentiles in Acts 10. And the same Spirit has been given to people around the world and through the expanse of the last two thousand years. The call to receive the gospel, the one and only saving message of God, is "Come."

Life application: In Genesis chapter 24, Abraham sends his servant on a mission to procure a bride for his son Isaac. The entire chapter points to the work of the Holy Spirit in procuring a bride for Jesus. The servant in the account prefigures the work of the Spirit and Rebekah prefigures the church. It is a beautiful story that contains astonishing parallels which then permeate the rest of the Bible.

This verse in Revelation is the completion of this picture, and it is the last mention in the Bible concerning the Holy Spirit. With the work of biblical inspiration coming to a close, and with one final petition, the call goes forth to those who will simply hear and respond – "Come!" As noted above, in addition to calling the people of God to be a bride, the Holy Spirit's role in redemptive history includes sealing those who have received the call for the day of redemption. He is the deposit and guarantee of the sure promises which come when one calls on Jesus.

The Holy Spirit also has had the role of giving to us the pages of the Bible through His divine inspiration. These and many other roles have been the work of the Holy Spirit, but one more needs to be mentioned. It is the testimony that He bears, and which brings into focus all of His other roles. The Spirit's testimony is about Jesus Christ –

> "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority,* but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. **14** He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. **15** All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you." John 16:13-15

Jesus is the One who reveals the unseen Father to us, and it is the overarching mission of the Holy Spirit to testify to the Person of Jesus. Thus, we can see that God is bringing glory to Himself through the incarnation and then illuminating Himself to us by focusing on this. This is why "the Spirit and the bride say, Come!" The Spirit is directing the attention to Christ. The bride, meaning those who have already called on Him, are calling for others to come as well – "Come to Christ and be reconciled to God."

This water is available to all, and He is given freely to all. A gift is something that cannot be paid for. Rather, this gift is something that must be accepted, by faith. The call has been given and God's offer stands. Now it is the job of the bride, the church, to get the message out. Let us be about the Lord's business. For all people, eternity awaits. Where they will spend it may be up to you simply opening your mouth.

It is time to be a part of what God is doing in the world. It is time to open your mouth and speak out the words of the gospel of God's Christ – JESUS!

Thank You, O God, for the beautiful words of the Bible which reveal to us the role of Your glorious Holy Spirit in the creation and all the way through to our eternal state. Thank You that You have given us all the details necessary to reveal Him to us so that we understand His glorious role within the Godhead. Amen.

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; Revelation 22:18

Strong and direct words now come forth. It is not certain who is the subject. Though possibly the angel, or even Jesus, it is just as likely that it is John who makes the proclamation. Either way, the words begin with, "For I testify."

This is the rendering of the Textus Receptus, but others simply say, "I testify." However, the "I" is in the emphatic position, making it the strongest possible attestation. Next, the words are "to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book." The verb is a present participle – "everyone hearing." In essence, "if you are hearing, you should be paying attention to what I say."

The word "hearing" includes the thoughts of hearing with the ears. It can also signify both "understand" and "pay heed to." It is a general word where the meaning has to be considered based on the intent of what is stated. In this case, John is referring to all who hear in the sense of "paying heed." And so, it could be someone who reads them to himself as much as hearing someone else read. And the warning is, "If anyone adds to these things."

The meaning here is adding in visions, instructions, warnings, and so on. What has been received by John is what is to be retransmitted as it was received, without any addition at all. Further, this is surely only speaking of the book of Revelation, even if the principle applies to all of Scripture.

At the time Revelation was written, it wasn't taken to a scroll room that held the other books of the Bible and added to them. Rather, it was a stand-alone book that was only later accepted as a part of the canon of Scripture. Therefore, the words now are only referring to Revelation. It is a thought similar to Moses' warning in Deuteronomy –

> "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."
>
> -Deuteronomy 4:2

> "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it." Deuteronomy 12:32

Later, it says this in Joshua –

> "Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that *was* by the sanctuary of the LORD." Joshua 24:25

Joshua's revelation did not violate the words of Moses but rather added to the revelation of God. This is seen later in the prophets when they are explicitly told to write words revealed to them for the people to see and understand the Lord's intention for them. John's words are the word of the Lord. As such, they would eventually be recognized as such and added to the canon of Scripture.

As for the warning from John, for those who fail to pay heed and who would presume to do so, it says, "God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book."

The idea is that of deserved retribution. The plagues of Revelation are brought upon the people of the world because they deserve it. As it said in Revelation 16 –

> "For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
> And You have given them blood to drink.
> For it is their just due." Revelation 16:6

Just as the world received its just due for rejecting Christ and rebelling against God, so will be the case for the one who presumes to add to the prophecies of Revelation.

<u>Life application:</u> Jesus' warning is in contrast to verse 1:3 – "Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near." This blessing is restated and amended as was noted in 22:7. Those who "keep" the word that has been given will be blessed. Keeping then implies that it is received and held to without change or by misrepresentation. In 1 Chronicles 10:13, Saul, the first king of Israel discovered the consequences of not keeping God's word –

> "So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance."

Time and again throughout the pages of Scripture, we are admonished to faithfully keep the word of the Lord. Jesus personally implored His audience to faithfully keep the words that have been given. He stood firm on the smallest letter or part of a letter as of absolute importance. In our hands as we read, or in our minds as we hear, come the very words of God that are recorded in the word of God. It is firm and fixed.

The only way to "keep" the word we have been given is to ensure that it is never changed, added to, taken from, or inappropriately manipulated. Because of this, the stern warning of this verse is given.

The Bible is God's personal expression of Himself to us. He reveals Himself through nature, but that is only a general revelation. However, He reveals Himself specifically through Jesus Christ, who is discovered throughout the scriptures of the Bible. Seeing this logical connection, then we can grasp the importance of the Bible.

We could in no way change God, and attempting to do so would be both futile and stupid. In the same way, by changing God's expression of Himself, we twist that which is otherwise perfect. Therefore, the words of Jesus make all the sense in the world. By adding to that which is God's perfect intent, we rightfully receive the just punishment we are due.

It is important to note that varying translations of the Bible cannot be considered in this admonition. And yes, there is disagreement as to the source texts from which the Bible is translated, but it is the faithful translation, without manipulation, which is being considered here.

One cannot say, for example, that the King James Version of the Bible is the only valid translation and that all others are wrong. The Bible is given in three original languages – Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Any competent translator or group of translators will form a translation different than anyone else simply because of presuppositions, past experiences, understanding of the text, etc. What Jesus is speaking of is a direct and purposeful intent to change Scripture, not a willing desire to faithfully translate it.

Understanding this, it should be carefully considered that purposeful and willful misrepresentation of an analysis of the Bible is no less damaging than an addition to it. When someone knowingly takes verses – or parts of verses – out of context, it becomes a perversion of what was intended by God. In the end concerning this thought, the admonition of James is of immense importance – "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

Let us each strive to carefully handle God's word. Let us treat it as we would treat the holiness of God Himself because it is His personal and special revelation of Himself to us. Stand firm on the truth of the word and be ready to faithfully transmit it to others to the glory of God. In the end, this word reveals God's plans to us, and how precious that plan is! It contains the promised coming, recorded coming, and anticipated return of our Lord, JESUS!

Lord God, Your word is precious and beyond compare. It is so rich, wonderful, and deep. Help us to handle it carefully and with the sense of awe and respect necessary to never diminish its value. Lord God, thank You for Your precious word which so beautifully reveals Your heart to us. Amen.

and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book. Revelation 22:19

Two differences in source texts are found in this verse. The first is that rather than "God shall take away," one text says, "may God take away." Also, one says, "Book of Life" and all others say, "Tree of Life."

With that noted, the words continue from the previous verse, saying, "and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy." It is just as wrong to take away from the word of God as it is to add to it. Such a person would assume the place of God, knowing better than He does what should be conveyed to the hearers of the word. What this is surely referring to is an intentional striking out of words, thoughts, or verses with the intent of changing what is presented.

It is without a doubt that scribal errors will come into any text unintentionally. Further, things are lost in translation. A translation of a translation will only increase that error. This must be attributed to unintentional human error, but not intentional manipulation. For those who would willingly manipulate the word, "God shall take away his part from the Book of Life."

As noted, the words here either read "Book of Life" or "Tree of Life." The latter certainly seems more likely based on the fact that it has been mentioned in connection with New Jerusalem in verses 22:2 and 22:14. Either way, the meaning is basically the same. This brings in an obvious problem with the doctrine of eternal security – a doctrine clearly taught in Scripture.

One explanation is that based on the source text, the words (as noted above) correctly read, “may God take away.” If this is so, then it is an appeal by John for it to be so, but it does not logically follow that God will do so. The calling down of an imprecation by a human does not necessitate that God will respond accordingly. If one is eternally saved, only a loss of rewards would be the result.

Another option is that such a person was never saved and never will be saved. A person may intentionally change the word of God while thinking he is already secure, but who has been following a false gospel (see Galatians 1:6-8) all along. To follow a false gospel, such as Mormonism, is to never have been saved in the first place. A person who is saved, and who simply forgot that it is so (e.g., see 2 Peter 1:9), would have no reason to change the word of God. He isn’t even thinking on such things. A person who is truly saved would also have no intention of purposefully changing the word.

And finally, with the word now complete and in the canon of Scripture, the word is sealed. It cannot be changed. As the most published document in human history, there is always suitable evidence concerning its contents.

Despite being a difficult thing to pin down, the doctrine of eternal salvation is clearly defined elsewhere in Scripture, and it is that which must be considered first when then considering the intent of this warning. And the warning next continues with, “from the holy city.”

The promise of access to the Tree of Life presupposes access into New Jerusalem where the Tree of Life is. To be restricted from the city means that the Tree of Life is denied to that person. The verse then ends with, “and *from* the things which are written in this book.” This speaks of all the other blessings promised to those who “overcome,” and who are deemed as saved believers of the Lamb of God. Whatever sure and blessed promises are given to God’s people, they will be withheld from such a person being referred to now.

<u>Life application:</u> The promise of eternal life stands for those who call on Jesus, but for those who have hardened their hearts and falsely manipulate God’s word, there will only be death. Jesus is the One through whom eternal life is granted. It is the Bible that reveals Him to us. Should someone purposefully change the very word which reveals Him by adding to it or subtracting from it, then a faulty view of Jesus may be the result. Therefore, those who then receive what has been manipulated will call on a false Messiah through a false gospel. This is the severity of what may occur when God’s word is misused.

The consequences are immense, and the warning has been given. Let us always be careful how we handle this precious gift. May we never twist or manipulate what He has given to us. Let us live in His presence and cherish the beautiful word of God all of our days. It is the word that tells us of God in Christ. Yes! It tells us of JESUS!

Lord Jesus, Your word is glorious and it is what we need in order to know You and Your wonderful gospel message. Help us to hold fast to it and to stand firm upon its precepts. May we rightly handle it and carefully present it to others all our days. Thank You for Your precious and eternal word. Amen.

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Revelation 22:20

As a note, many manuscripts omit the word translated as "Even so." With that understood, the verse is a follow-up to the warnings just cited in verses 18 and 19. It is a statement of surety, saying, "He who testifies to these things." The verb is a present participle and is better translated as –

> "he saith -- who is testifying these things" (YLT)

It is the final witness of the book of Revelation, given by Christ Himself. What is stated about adding to or taking from the word is called forth to be considered. The words have come from Christ to show what is coming upon the world, and they are to be considered from that position of His authority. And His final words to His audience are, "Surely I am coming quickly."

It is the same thought as verse 22:12, and it is a warning against slackness or doubt. It is a warning to those who would deride the thought of His ever coming again due to the passage of whatever length of time may pass. Christ Jesus has spoken, He has witnessed to the certainty of the matter, and those who hear are to be in constant vigilance as they await the promise of His return.

With that stated, the apostle follows up with his excited words of anticipation, beginning with, "Amen." It is a confirmation of the words just expressed. The word itself means "a truth," "so let it be," "most assuredly," and so on. John is essentially saying, "As You have spoken, so may it be." He then follows up with, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

As noted above, various manuscripts leave off the words, "Even so." Either way, the expression directs the mind to the final words of petition. John, despite all of the many

horrors that must come upon humanity as described in the book, still makes his appeal. Those who are unjust, will be unjust. Those who are filthy, will be filthy. Those who are righteous, will be righteous. And those who are holy, will be holy.

The masses of humanity will follow the course they choose, and delaying the inevitable beyond what the Lord determines would serve no purpose. And so, John calls for Him to come.

> "Make haste, my beloved,
> And be like a gazelle
> Or a young stag
> On the mountains of spices." Song of Solomon 8:14

Life application: Based on the content, structure, intricacy, and continuity of this book in relation to the rest of the Bible, we have every confidence that Revelation is the authentic received word of God and the end of the official canon of the Bible. Jesus' statement in this verse is the final note of authenticity given for our assurance of this.

It is important to consider that because Genesis shows us what was lost and the curse man could expect from His disobedience, and then immediately begins to show us what God is doing in and through history, that there must be a set and definite plan to return mankind to the paradise he had lost. There must be an end that will be revealed to show us what and how God would accomplish that goal. It would make no sense to show us the entrance of sin into the world and the consequences of that disobedience if nothing further was planned to resolve the breach, or if nothing else was expected for or of man after it occurred.

In other words, if man was fallen and separated from God, why would it matter what occurred or what man did after that point if the fall was irreconcilable? "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

The early Genesis account would simply be an executioner's statement, lording the matter over the condemned. But right there at the fall, even during the sentencing of the crime, the plan of redemption was hinted at –

> "And I will put enmity
> Between you and the woman,
> And between your seed and her Seed;
> He shall bruise your head,
> And you shall bruise His heel." Genesis 3:15

Every word of the Bible is given as a testament to the fact that man is worth redeeming and that God will redeem him. And so, the Bible unfolds in a manner that shows every imaginable permutation of how it could come about by our efforts and how at every turn we would fail in the task. But with each story, there remained the underlying hint that these failures were given to lead us to something better; to Someone far more capable. Like all of Scripture, the Law of Moses was to direct us to our utterly fallen state and to call our attention to God's grace as the only possible way to be reconciled.

That grace of God is found in the Person of Jesus Christ, and it is He who testifies to us of the things set forth for us to consider. The reconciliation and restoration have been accomplished, and the eternal bliss that was intended for man has been restored through Him. And so, God – the Lord Jesus Christ – personally testifies that this is His plan and that it is true and reliable. It is important for us to realize that because all is accomplished with this verse, then nothing else can be added to it and nothing else can be considered in the plan.

This leads us to the assurance that any prophecy which somehow attempts to add to the Bible, or any book which has supposedly come after Revelation to reveal more of God's will, cannot be true. In Revelation, Jesus Christ is revealed. In Revelation, Jesus' plan is accomplished. In Revelation is the fulfillment of the ancient promise. And therefore, in Revelation is the completion of God's prophetic word. Nothing is to be held as comparable and nothing is to be expected. Nothing from God will amend it, add to it, contradict it, or further clarify it.

Understanding this, we can reject any written utterance which claims to be authoritative concerning the redemption of man – either within or outside the confines of Christianity. No other religion is acceptable (John 14:6) and no other gospel can be considered (Galatians 1:6-9).

This is the warning and the admonition for those who look to God for restoration: stand firm on the Bible and nothing else. We cannot accept as inspired the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, the writings of Buddha, or any other religious or philosophical text which points to reunion with God outside of the confines of Christianity. And we also cannot accept as inspired supposedly "infallible" Papal utterances, the Book of Mormon, the "prophecies" of Ellen G. White, or any other writings or claims which come from within the context of the Christian world. The Bible stands alone and complete.

And then, after testifying to the received word, Jesus adds His final spoken reminder to the people of the world, *Nai erchomai tachy,* "Yes I am coming quickly." The last words uttered by the Lord of Creation – our Redeemer, Savior, King, and God are an

admonition and a warning. Be alert, be ready, and be vigilant with your life, your doctrine, and your conduct. The time is soon, meaning that the Lord's return is imminent. We, therefore, need to have our eyes lifted and our lives in order.

In response, John jubilantly turns around and writes using the same expression used by Jesus – *Amen. Nai ercho kurie Iesou*. – Amen. Yes, come Lord Jesus. One can feel the anticipation in the flowing ink as he writes to his Lord, God, and Friend on behalf of all of those who, like him, so desperately look forward to the coming glories described in the book. The final prayer recorded in Scripture is given, and it is a prayer of acknowledgment that Jesus Is Lord, and it is a prayer of petition – "Amen. Even so, come, Lord JESUS!"

Lord God, my Lord God, how wonderfully great You are and how beautiful are the promises You have given us in Your precious word. Thank You, O God, for the surety that those things which have been promised will come to pass exactly as they have been spoken. Give us the presence of mind to stand fast on them as we await what is coming. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen. Revelation 22:21

As a note, various manuscripts say –

- The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.
- The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.
- The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

These are just a few of the variations. Also, the word "Amen" is not included in all manuscripts. With that noted, the Bible ends with these words. Jesus has spoken, and John completes the chapter, book, and canon of Scripture with the words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is unmerited favor. Grace cannot be earned. Grace is a gift.

Each of these explains God's giving of Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ. We were set on a path to destruction with no hope of changing that, but God sent Jesus. We could never work our way out of this dilemma, but God sent Jesus. We could never pay our way out of the mess we are in, but God sent Jesus. Our situation was futile, but in the giving of Christ, the grace of God has changed all of that.

And this gift is universally offered. Regardless of the translation (as noted in the differences above), the offering of Jesus Christ is extended to all. The NKJV says, "*be* with you all." Others say, "be with all." Still others, "with all the saints." The fact is that a

saint is simply someone who was once “not” a saint. He heard the gospel, accepted its premise, called out for God’s saving provision, and was saved.

But the grace then extends beyond the salvation. There is the continued grace of God which is the assurance of that salvation. There is the instruction of God found in His word which guides us for sanctification.

There is the hope of glory, there is the fellowship of the saints, there is the joy of release from our debts, and so on. All of this is tied up in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. All of it exists because of what He has done, and none of it would exist without Him. The fulness of the grace of God is found in the giving of Christ to reconcile us to Himself. With that in mind, John completes Scripture with the word “Amen.” So be it. Yes, and may it be so.

Life application: With tears of joy and the eager expectation of the fulfillment of every promise God has spoken to His people, we have arrived at the last verse of His word. At this time, let us return to the first verse of the Bible, the last verse of the Old Testament, and the first verse of the New Testament. By doing so, let each of us call to remembrance in our own minds everything we can which has been given between these verses –

> “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1
>
> “And he will turn
> The hearts of the fathers to the children,
> And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
> Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” Malachi 4:6
>
> “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:” Matthew 1:1

The Bible begins under the assumption that God exists, that He is the Creator, and that the heavens and the earth are a part of what He has created and therefore they are both good and have an eternal purpose within His mind.

The Old Testament ends with the promise of a curse unless the people take to heart the warnings and admonitions given to them. A curse is obviously contrary to the original intent of the creation and therefore the warning is given – there is both a hope and the possibility of avoiding the curse.

The New Testament immediately enters into the subject of the Person of Jesus Christ. From then on, He takes center stage. The anticipation of Messiah, through the direction of Yehovah (the Lord) of the Old Testament, culminates in the unveiled and glorious Lord Jesus of the New.

There is no point that He isn't the center and focus of what is being conveyed because "it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:19, 20).

The resounding and continuously noted concept of the grace of God is found throughout the pages of the Bible. From the covering of Adam and Eve after the fall, to Abraham's declaration of righteousness for taking God at His word, to the choosing of a ruddy young shepherd boy from the hills of Bethlehem to lead the people of Israel – and in countless other stories of normal people who are given what they don't deserve, simply because of the goodness of God. It is grace that draws these people near to Him.

This concept of God's grace is then personalized in the New Testament. Jesus is the heart of what God is trying to tell us. If we will only listen. Nothing could be clearer, and yet it is completely missed by far too many. For every person who stands up and tells of God's grace, there are a dozen behind him telling us that this grace only goes so far and that we need to step in and do something more to earn what is freely offered. How can we escape this trap?

First, we must understand what grace is. It is the unmerited divine assistance given to us for our redemption, justification, sanctification, and eventual glorification. It is a virtue coming from God, externally and without our assistance. It cannot be earned because it is unmerited. This is the heart of the gospel message. What we couldn't do for ourselves, God did for us through the giving of His Son. To attempt to earn God's grace through works then is an affront to God because it says to Him that what He has done is insufficient.

Second, once we know what grace is, we simply have to accept it; reach out, grab it, and then not waffle in our belief that what we have received will lead us throughout our lives and even through all eternity.

This is what John conveys one last time as he closes out the book of Revelation and the Bible – "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen." In an amazing display of the very concept of grace, we see it in these words. Jesus, our Creator, left it to a man, His beloved apostle, to finalize His word to us.

Imagine the honor bestowed upon John to personally close out the Word of God. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God has allowed him, a mere man, this eternal treasure. And for each of us who comes to know Jesus, we have a similar precious honor – that of telling others of the glorious Lord who came to walk among us, die on a cross for us, and then to resurrect to eternal life that we may, by grace through faith, be called children of God. Thank God for His provision. Thank God for JESUS!

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.